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**A SOCIO-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF
CREATIVITY IN CAPITALISM:
A CASE STUDY OF AN
ADVERTISING AGENCY
IN HONG KONG**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies creativity in capitalism from a critical socio-cultural perspective. It draws upon and re-interprets the insights of such masters of modern sociological thoughts as Weber and Marx, and, based on empirical field data, analyses the tension between capitalism and creativity and the potential in the former for the latter.

The research, based on field research lasting over six months in a respected advertising agency in Hong Kong, studies the culture and the social process occurring in a specific organizational context. Participant observation and interviews are the major methods employed for this study. The aim of the study is to find out how certain prerequisites of a capitalist organization can intimidate the functioning and the development of creativity and how certain practices, at an operational and organizational level, are at work to counteract the pressures generated by capitalism.

Key findings suggest that creativity is difficult but possible in a capitalist context. The possibility is very much dependent on the role taken by the leaders. The notion of charisma, coined by Max Weber, helps explain the importance of leadership in resolving the constant tensions generated from the dynamics between profit, efficiency and creativity. Furthermore, it is found that the charismatic leadership is an active, flexible and high-energy platform for organizing creativity and inducing change in a capitalist organization.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation studies creativity in a capitalist organization from a critical socio-cultural perspective. The inquiry makes use of the case of an advertising agency to investigate issues related to creativity in a capitalist line-up: how and why creativity is possible in a capitalist organization, its sociological significance, and finally, how it responds and serves to induce changes.

Selecting creativity as the topic is not an arbitrary choice. Creativity is not only regarded as necessary ‘capital’, a factor of production, for the ‘culture industry’ or the entertainment business, but an important topic widely debated in the current corporate world. Either companies seek creativity and want to know how best to harness it, or if they already depend on it, they want to know how best to get more of it. Current themes of the creativity dialogue centre on how best to foster, cultivate, retain, or recruit creativity. This is seen in attempts to calculate the most creativity enhancing ‘creative management’ practices, as in how to better manage for creativity, and the promotion of more innovative and flexible workforces, work

practices and enterprises. This creativity thrust is variously titled industrial creativity, corporate creativity (Springmann 1999) or corporate intelligence (Hansen 1998). It seems creativity is now the watchword for 21st century success. (MacKay, 2000)

In contrast to the management and organizational literature, the concept of creativity in the literature of sociology occupies a rather marginal role. It is not that the concept is unimportant, but rather, the usages of it have been unclear and imprecise. This is due to the ‘ancient’ history of the term, allowing varied and diverse readings of it, thus making it difficult to interpret. A comprehensive history of the idea is not the aim of this study, but we should note that the idea originates far back to Greek classical philosophy, revived in the Renaissance period as a divine inspiration for arts and aesthetics, and it became a fashionable word in the 18th century to refer to the ‘capability’ usually possessed by ‘geniuses’. Hans Joas has made a detailed study of the term in relation to the sociology of action (1996), and identified three basic dimensions of the concept, “I am referring here to the idea of *expression* in the work of Johann Gottfried Herder, and the ideas of *production* and *revolution* in Karl Marx’s writings” (Joas, 1996: 71: italics are mine). These three dimensions of expression, production and revolution serve as a basic

guideline for determining the usage of the idea in this study and they also provide a thread for the reconstruction of the concept of creativity alongside the review of capitalism in the following chapter.

The selection of an advertising agency as the research case is not an arbitrary choice. It is chosen as the case because the nature of the advertising business is doubly conditioned: it is conditioned by the needs for profit and efficiency as well as by the need for creativity. In the advertising world, money cannot be accrued if there is no creativity. Creativity is not ‘mind games’ or ‘fine art exercises’ in the advertising business. It concerns not only with ‘decorative’ graphics and texts, but also with how to nurture a favourable condition for the practice of creativity in the context of a business organization whose aim is not limited to sole profit making. These needs are in conflict, if not contradictory. Thus, advertising is a business always situated at the crossroads. It therefore serves as a very good research case for the exploration of the dichotomy between capitalism and creativity. Moreover, I intend to demonstrate that creativity for the advertising business is not restricted to an understanding that it is a necessary but trivial tool for doing the ‘cultural businesses’. Rather, creativity can affect in a very significant way of how a company organizes itself. Hence, the research can also be treated as an exemplary

case of how creativity can be put to use in an organizational context.

The approach chosen is basically ethnographical, and participant observation and interview are the major techniques I employ for the research study. I hope that, by way of a qualitative study of an advertising agency in Hong Kong, the cultural process at work in a capitalist organization can be illustrated. The aim is to document how certain prerequisites of a capitalist organization can inhibit the functioning and the development of creativity, and how certain practices, at an operational and organizational level, are at work to counteract the pressures generated by capitalism for the need of creativity. Furthermore, the qualitative approach helps to explore the possibility of creativity in a capitalist organization by locating the agent and identifying the social process that provides the conditions for its cultivation.

While most of the sociological masters have adopted a negative view of the possibility of sustaining creativity under the regime of capitalism, this dissertation tries to argue that creativity is an indispensable as well as a positive element for the development of capitalism. I would like to put forward the argument that creativity is not only a possible but a positive pursuit for a capitalist organization.

There exist some devices/agents operating at an organizational level to balance the need for profit and order on the one hand and the need for creativity on the other. In this study, the leadership as observed in the selected case functions in a very important way to organize creativity and to resolve the constant tensions generated by the dynamics between profit, efficiency and creativity in the context of a capitalist organization. I would also like to call attention to the significance of this special platform by devoting the last two analysis chapters, Chapter Seven and Eight, hoping that they pave the ground for future studies about the issues concerning the organizing of creativity and the problem of change.

CHAPTER TWO

Is Creativity Possible in a Capitalist Context?

2.1 Introduction

In this literature review, I would tackle the concept of creativity and explore its possible relationship to the concept of capitalism. I seek to do so by tracing in detail through the sociology literature how some important concepts concerning capitalism can enrich our understanding of practicing creativity in a capitalist context. My real aim lies mainly in drawing support from the past scholarship for my argument that creativity is not only possible but a necessary activity in and of capitalism. Moreover, by expanding on the concepts as developed by the sociological masters, I attempt to open up a space for incorporating the concept of creativity into the theoretical framework of my research.

Before reviewing how the sociology masters see the problem of capitalism, some notes on the term 'creativity' need to be made here. There is considerable literature on the subject of creativity, including such classic studies as Koestler's (1964), which attempt to describe the conditions that give rise to the creative

achievements of artists and scientists. Brilliant though they are, their focuses are limited to the discipline of the fine arts and their analyses are psychological in orientation. There is much within social psychology as well as in educational or management studies that shows how creativity is embedded in ordinary psychological and social processes. Whereas the former is inclined to focus upon attributes of the creative personality or creative intelligence (Boden, 1990), the latter tends to discuss the practical measures whereby creativity can be nurtured within various work settings (Maslow, 1962; Morgan, 1989). There are also discussions on how organizational creativity is associated with managing product and process innovation (Burns and Stalker, 1994), but they tend to be pragmatic in intention and prescriptive in nature, without going in depth into the conditions upon which creativity can be articulated.

However, from the viewpoint of sociology, it is the condition that becomes the subject matter, whether this condition is a historical one or an institutional one, or a combination of both, and it has attracted some important thinkers to devote their primary concern for achieving an understanding of the distinctive features of this very 'condition'. Terms are numerous for describing this general condition, but two key themes stand out as the most important as they evoke exceptional

explanatory power. They are ‘modernity’ and ‘capitalism’. They both refer to a historical context that originated in the 19th century western world. The concepts overlap, and, throughout the history of sociology, they are often interchangeably used by many thinkers and scholars to denote similar phenomena arisen with the advance of the industrial society. I choose the term ‘capitalism’ for the whole study out of my prime concern for the relationship between economy and culture, especially the impact on each other owing to their intense interplay.¹ It is upon this premise that ‘creativity’ has to be ‘demystified’ and ‘historicized’, meaning that the concept will not be treated as a given in the theoretical framework of the study.

From the perspective of sociology, the meaning of creativity, and the form it adopts, can only be uncovered in relation to the conditions upon which it arises. So, the idiosyncratic traits and the mysterious bursting of genius of some particular artists or leaders are not to be treated in their own terms, an unquestionable quality sufficiently serving as its own reason, nor are they regarded as an accidental happening in history. In other words, the issue of creativity will not be treated as an unquestionable quality or talent in any philosophical way. Rather, creativity has to be understood as a socio-cultural process that shapes and is shaped by its

¹ The term ‘modernity’ addresses questions more related to the new emerging way of life, more concerned with the impact of the new conditions on the experience of forms of social and cultural life.

environment. It is based on this sociological understanding that I orient my whole study. The way I tackle the issue of creativity is guided by the question of how creativity manifests itself in a capitalist environment as some organized forms or ‘configurations’. Genius or extraordinary talents, whether they are embodied in a particular person or a social group, will be put under the perspective of sociology to see how they affect, and are affected by, other factors of capitalism in the context of a business organization.

However, throughout the sociology literature, we can find only scant references to the concept of creativity, and it is seldom referred to in the major writings of the sociology masters. This does not mean that it is totally absent in the sociology history. It may be scattered around in the writings of the sociology masters, or it is embedded in some other concepts waiting for lucid explication. So, aside from reviewing how the sociology masters see the problem of capitalism, it is also my purpose in the following review to retrieve the meaning of creativity long buried in some sociological concepts that might be conducive for theorizing a workable definition for the whole thesis.

2.2 Capitalism and its Organizing Principles

The term 'capitalism' was first coined by, though not an invention of, Werner Sombart, a late 19th century German sociologist. He defined it as "a commercial organization in which two different groups of the population are connected by the market and cooperate regularly: the owners of the means of production, who at the same time have control and are the subjects of the economy, and propertyless mere labourers as objects of the economy; it is an organization which is dominated by the acquisitive principle and by economic rationalism". (Sombart, 2001: 15) In the definition, we can find attributes like free market, owners of production, a free labour market, etc., which are generally identified by economists as essential features of capitalism. But what is most important is that the two arching concepts, that is, the 'acquisitive principle' and the 'economic rationalism', are identified as the organizing principle of this mechanism. They are the dominant forces that determine the outlook, form and dynamic in any capitalist institution or organization.

In the history of sociology, these two determining forces were emphasized respectively in two lines of thought, with one centered on the issue of profit and the other on the issue of rationality. Although they are actually equally important,

the emphasis placed on each of them leads scholars in sociology to align themselves to different intellectual orientations and to draw diverse or even contrasting conclusions about capitalism. In the case of Karl Marx, the most important exponent of the 'profit perspective', the acquisitive principle was interpreted as the unfair allocation of resources to the propertied class, thus resulting in an alienated world inhabited by the propertyless general masses, left only with the life and death choice of revolution or continuing submission to the dominant class. As for the thinkers aligned to the rationality perspective, the conclusion is even more pessimistic. Max Weber, the spokesman of the rationality perspective, interpreted the system as an 'iron cage' of instrumental reason, under which novelty and originality will soon turn into futility by a process known as 'routinization'. Although the perspectives of these two lines of thoughts are totally different, they come to a similar conclusion: that capitalism, under the appearance of economic blossoming, brings along with it a world not worth living in because the life-enriching elements are extracted in face of 'alienation', and creativity is suppressed or soon to be waned out by the routinization process. In the following explication, I would like to demonstrate how these two perspectives see capitalism as producing unfavourable conditions for the development of creativity.

2.2.1 The profit perspective

The profit perspective originates in the economic sciences, or more appropriately the discipline of political economy in its 19th century expression, and it is commonly referred as ‘economism’, which “is the informed belief that all societies, at their foundations, are driven by economic interests; and accordingly, that the ethics or religious values or political ideas people profess are of no true importance in defining their real-life situations” (Lemert, 2002: 68). This view is shared by a lot of disciplines like economics, sociology, political sciences and the recent management studies. Whatsoever the arguments and positions these different disciplines try to make use of this perspective, they all share a common view of capitalism as basically driven by the economic self-interest.²

Building on this presupposition, capitalism is believed to be first of all an economic system and its sole function is to generate profit for its own sake. According to the economic interpretation of capitalism, all other phenomena such as religion, culture and society are regarded as ephemeral, meaning that they are only transient expressions of their material basis, with no autonomy of their own. In this sense, creativity is regarded as the ‘second-order’ phenomenon of the first cause, the

² Economists after Adam Smith even turn self-interest into an unquestionable presupposition of all economic activity.

economic self-interest, of capitalism.

However, the factor of self-interest as propounded by 'economism' does not suffice for explaining a system that is circular in nature: automatically feeding back its output into input for perpetuating the functioning of the system. It begs a question of why self-interest can generate a system that is self-perpetuating.

The explanation was supplied by Werner Sombart, a German sociologist, and it was then further elaborated into a theory by the Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter.

The economic reductionism commonly adopted by economists was criticized by both authors as underestimating the systematic character and the self-propelling nature of capitalism. Sombart explicitly claimed that, "Activity in the capitalistic system is no longer determined by the needs, quantitatively and qualitatively limited, of one person or of a group of persons...The positive drive towards boundless acquisition is grounded in the conditions of management. It is empirically true, though not logically inevitable, that any enlargement of business reacts to its own advantage, at least quantitatively through an extension of its sphere of exploitation and sometimes also qualitatively through a reduction of costs. This provides the stimulus to the continuous expansion of a business, often contrary to the expressed

wishes of its owners and managers” (*Sombart*, 2001: 7). Capitalism is a system and it is a self-propelling system in the sense that the outlook of expansion (exploiting new markets) and cost-controlling are only expressions of its systemic need to acquire further capital in order to renew itself in face of the competitive situation of the market. In Sombart’s hands, the presupposition of the psychological ‘self-interests’ was totally discarded and the principle of acquisition is not a matter of personal choice, but built into the very system of capitalism.

Brilliant though they are, the formulation of Sombart and Schumpeter of the principle of profit acquisition tells only one side of the story. It was Karl Marx who made an explicit formulation of how capitalism functions according to a logic that is based on the dialectical relationship of capital and its counterpart, labour. “Capital is self-expanding value” (Marx, 1976:105), according to Marx, but it is self-expanding only at the expense of labour. Here, a brief detour is needed in order to correctly understand the proposition of Marx. We need not go in-depth into the analysis of the form of ‘commodity’, the most general and common form which penetrates and imprint its form of relationship onto nearly everything in a capitalist society, but we need to understand that there are always two sides for the same coin if we talk about value in a capitalist society. Marx asserted that the logic

of capitalism lies exactly at the inter-section of the double nature of value, namely the use-value and the exchange value.³ It concerns what counts as labour, or more explicitly, which aspects of labour would be counted as more important under the pre-eminence of this relationship of equivalence.

According to the logic of capital, the substantial aspect of labour is downplayed or not counted, while the abstract value of labour is regarded as the sole source of value in the production. It is here that profit acquisition is an expression of a movement of capital, that is, the ever-renewing process of appropriating the use value of its living labour into surplus in the production process. It is also here that the origin of the irresistible urge for expansion, which endows capitalism with its restless, mechanical and inhumane character, is revealed. The origin rests on none but the self-propelling need of capital to generate extra exchange value at the expense of use value and thus bringing a concomitant flattening of the human capacity.

In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx wrote much about the human relationship to the products of labour, as well as the process of production

³ To Marx, the exchange value overshadows the use value in the capitalist form of society and what matters the most to the value of labour is its quantitative character rather than the qualitative character in this relationship.

and the production activity itself (Marx, 1978). For Marx, labour is thought to be the key mediation between people and nature whereby people transform nature and are themselves transformed in the process. Ideally, labour is the natural link through which human potential can be brought to its expression and thus fruition. However, under the regime of capitalism, the human potential of labour is flattened at the expense of ‘commodification’, that is, a process which recognizes only the exchange value of labour. In Marx’s view, capital has taken from the living labour any possibility to experiment, improvise or create, resulting in a condition known as ‘alienation’. In his deliberations, Marx contends that alienation is suffered by humans in four forms: alienation from the products of labour, alienation from the production process itself, alienation from other human beings, and lastly alienation from the human species. Marx clarifies the ‘suffering’ stance of alienation in work in that “First, the fact the labour is external to the worker, i.e. it does not belong to his essential being, that is his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy” (Marx 1978: 74). Alienated labour is thus in essence a negative circumstance where human labour becomes externalized or objectified and stands against any possibility for creativity.

In the context of work, alienation became a major theorized effect in the

assembly-line and mass production factory-workers' reality in the increasingly Taylorist and Fordist industrial economy. In essence, the effect of alienated labour is negative as it is espoused that there is a lack of 'self-actualization' where their self, their labour process and its products become alien to labourers. In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and Engels stated that "labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce" (Marx and Engels, [1848] 1986: 41).

This negative view on the possibility of human labour is elaborated by different scholars after Marx. The most notable are the thinkers of the Frankfurt School (Adorno, 1973; Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947; Habermas, 1984). Although their studies are so diverse and wide-ranging, from the 'culture industry' analysis to the highly complicated theoretical attempt of Habermas to understand the society as a network of 'distorted communication', the theme of 'alienation' still occupies a central position in their opus and their primary concern is to recover the 'life-world'⁴ under an 'alienated' condition of capitalism. Another relevant example is the studies on the labour process (Baran and Sweezy, 1966; Braverman,

⁴ Habermas uses the concept of 'Life World' to denote a dimension of life which bases itself not on the exchange and power mechanism but on a consensus-forming mechanism.

1974; Burawoy, 1979). The theme of 'alienation' is re-examined empirically in various kinds of production environments, including factory, shop-floor, or some new business contexts like IT companies, and these studies give further support to Marx's argument that the human dimension is in shrinkage in the capitalist environment, in despite of the fact that technology has already advanced to the digital era. The spokesman of the labour process theory, Braverman, wrote of the 'habituation' and 'degradation' of the worker to the capitalist mode of production, a process transforming humanity into an instrument of capital. To Braverman, under the context of the capitalist production, the workers' 'critical, intelligent and conceptual faculties' remain a 'threat to capital' (Braverman, 1974: 139).

In sum, we can conclude in brief that all the fellow Marxists, though different in their orientations and focuses, still fall in with Marx's proposition that the potentiality of our human capacity only works to the dictates of the capital and restricts its momentum to the sole goal of accumulation for further profit. Here we can notice that the environment created out of the capitalist production system is increasingly perceived by the Marxists as an unfavourable ground for generating a humane, meaningful and creative condition of work. In their view, human capacity is increasingly alienated in the capitalist environment, from the activity it is

undertaking and from the products it is to produce. Creativity, under the prism of the Marxists, neglected and buried under the regime of exchange, notorious for its 'one-dimensionality'.

2.2.2 Rationalization process

Apart from the prism of profit acquisition, capitalism is also seen as the climax of a long started general process known as 'rationalization', an all-encompassing process that pervades society with a unifying principle based on a precise calculation of means adequate to the achievement of given ends. Although the origin of this process can be varied: an expression of the Protestant ethics, an extension of the money economy or an elaboration upon the division of labour, the process itself can be regarded as a logical extension of a system perpetuating itself by means of the value of equivalence, which is the yardstick upon which all calculations become possible. This principle can be expressed differently in the hands of different scholars, such as the increasing depersonalization of social relations, the increasing specialization between and within various departments in the society, and the concomitant intellectualization of all realms of knowledge (Simmel, 1990; Durkheim, 1984; Weber, 1992; see also Ritzer, 1996). Out of all, two generalizations stand out to be the most relevant to this study: the analysis of the

predominance of the objective culture by Georg Simmel and the bureaucratization process as espoused by Max Weber. The starting point of both authors is quite similar in nature – referring to a process increasingly getting rid of unruly passion and sentiment, but they differ in their perspectives regarding the effects and consequences on the individual.

Before Weber, Simmel devoted his masterpiece⁵ as early as 1900 to analyze the profound effect of the money economy on the nature of human relationship. He claimed that the pure objectivity of the treatment of people and things is achieved and expressed in the form of money, which is the purest expression of an exchange relationship and this in turn leads to an emphasis on calculability and rationality in all spheres of life. The result is an increasingly reified world where the means overtake the ends as the ideal expression in the capitalist era and the unbalanced emphasis on the means develops into an objective culture⁶, which is external to and even coercive of individuals. What is most relevant to our study is that the impersonality of the system, in the hands of Simmel, triggers off a series of

⁵ *The Philosophy of Money*, 1990.

⁶ It is defined as the totality of cultural objects, originally created by the actors, acquires a life of its own and distances itself from the actors who create it further in an expression of a powerful and self-contained entity. “Objective culture is the historical presentation or more or less perfect condensation of an objectively valid truth which is reproduced by our cognition.” (Simmel, 1990, p.452)

response that is antagonistic to the coercive objective culture. Authentic human relationships, in response, are increasingly characterized by a “blasé and reserved” attitude. This attitude, though bizarre, is necessary for the individuals to preserve their subjectivity in face of a heightened and overdeveloped objective culture. In most cases, it might take the extreme form of “the most tendentious eccentricities, the specially metropolitan excesses of aloofness, caprice and fastidiousness” in order to preserve one’s sense of distinctiveness from one’s fellows and one’s environment (Simmel, 1971: 202). In the view of Simmel, the life force cannot easily be tamed and it must find outlets, however peculiar, if there were no appropriate channel for expression in the existing cultural forms.

Creativity, when finding no appropriate platforms, reacts only in terms of unrelated idiosyncratic acts and does not give rise to socially patterned culture. Life force is a constant in our humanity but, in Simmel’s view, there is no resolve in the antagonistic relationship between the ‘creative’ individual and the fixed and reified system.⁷ Simmel’s merit lies exactly in his emphasize on the active life force

⁷ To the individual, powerlessness and meaningless results since they are not able to transform those stimuli brought about by the money economy into cultural creativity, that is, they are not capable of integrating them meaningfully into their selves. Inversely, it reveals also at the same time that the flexibility of the system to incorporate and organize creativity is very much related to how it conceive of the expressions of the life force – the capacity of the system to understand and to make use of bizarreness and irrationality in the contemporary capitalist society.

(echoing Karl Marx) and the cultural expressions this very life force might take in face of the widespread rationalization. Although the investigation of Simmel is very important in understanding the expressions of cultural creativity in an era permeated by the rationalization process, the formulation of his is far from logical lucidity and explicitness. Max Weber, starting not from a metaphysical position, goes in depth into the nexus of the issue of the rationalization and makes very good use of the concept of 'bureaucracy' to restate once again, but in more precise formulation, what Simmel's 'objective culture' really means to capitalism.

'Bureaucracy' is the microscopic prism through which Weber carried out his analysis of the 'infrastructure' of capitalism. There is no mysticism about the jargon used by Weber. Rendering in more literal terms, the word 'bureau' is actually the French translation of the English 'office'. Thus, a bureaucracy is a structured system in which the occupants of office are considered the legitimate rulers of some organized sphere so long as they follow the rules of the office. In Weberian terms, the characteristics of bureaucracy includes at least three indispensable aspects: first, a delineation of rationality into a formalized structure, resting upon a complex, hierarchically organized divisions of tasks, second, the specializations of functions and third, rules and regulations based on impersonality (authority rested in the

offices rather than the personal qualities of personnel). Weber was not only the one who wrote at length on the subject, but also the one who pointed out that the rational structuring of authority was the most distinctive feature of the modern capitalist system. In the eyes of Weber, the on-going as well as wide-spreading process of rationalization that accumulates in the form of 'objective culture', as observed by Simmel, can be better rendered in the concept of bureaucracy because it represents an 'ideal' model, emphasized by its "purely technical superiority over any other forms of organization", that matches perfectly well with the pervasive rationalization's demand of 'calculability of results'.⁸

However, the importance of Weber lies not only at his sensitivity to 'coin' a term to denote the basic structure of the capitalist system, but also his insight that the modern capitalist society was actually founded on a contradiction arisen out of the tension-laden nature of the bureaucracy. On the one hand, bureaucracy is the form of authority that provides the greatest possible assurance to the masses that the natural tendency of the rulers to become despots will be held in check.

⁸ Weber testified that, "Normally, the very large modern capitalist enterprises are themselves unequalled modes of strict bureaucratic organization. Business management throughout rests on increasing precision, steadiness and above all, the speed of operations... Bureaucratisation offers above all the optimum possibility for carrying through the principle of specializing administrative functions according to purely objective considerations. Individual performances are allocated to functionaries who have specialized training and who by practice learn more and more. The objective discharge of business primarily means a discharge of business according to calculable rules and without regard to persons." (Weber 1964: 215)

Everything that is happening in the social sphere is no longer totally dependent on a person's passion and idiosyncrasy. Authority is created by the rules of an office, and not by the power of the person in charge, then in principle the person in authority can be held accountable to the rules. The idea of bureaucracy is that the structured rules of an office are a higher authority than any person who holds the office, which is to say that the structure of the authority is separated from, and in principle, superior to, the person who holds a temporary right to its power. Stability is thus achieved and the proper functioning of the system is also guaranteed. Moreover, mainly because of the rule of office, the 'private interest', which is the prime mover for prosperity in a capitalist system, of each in society can be balanced and weighed upon a fair scale, at least in legal terms theoretically. To Weber, it is the second cornerstone of capitalism, without which the first, the profit maximization, can only operate without fruition.

However, Weber also saw that there was another side to these rationally structured rules of authority. Rules are very difficult to change when they become cumbersome or useless, especially when they multiply and degenerate into a sluggish system. That was what Weber described as the 'routinization' process. It is used to describe the tendency all rationally structured organizations tend to follow, that is,

the reasonableness of the rules of authority usually fades as rules proliferate, creating objections of all kinds. The bureaucracy is increasingly becoming machinelike and the advantage of being automatic and autonomous soon falls into its negative, becoming autocratic and inflexible, discrediting the virtue of its reasonableness. In the eyes of Weber, the radical objectification of the pervasive rationalization in the form of bureaucracy can often go too far to express itself in an image of 'iron cage', under which its individual member is placed to abide by its abstract rules, increasingly neglecting the goal behind. It might probably lead to the state of inertia, in which people are afraid to change for fear of violating rules or disobedience, consequently weakening any agenda for change. Weber saw this problem as the basic problem of all bureaucracies, lamenting the possible 'loss of meaning' and the concomitant retreat of substantive concern in the capitalist era. In view of this perspective, creativity is regarded as unruly behaviours that can cause inefficiency, thus disrupting the proper flow of the capitalist system.

2.3 Alternative Perspectives on Capitalism and the Concept of Creativity

I would like to argue that, despite the pessimistic interpretations of the masters, insightful ideas are already impregnated in their critiques of capitalism and they can be used to construct a workable concept of creativity, which can serve as a remedy for the problems of ‘alienation’ and ‘routinization’ in the capitalist system.

The first source of the positive treatment of capitalism in relations to the possibility of creativity should be credited to the one who pioneered the subject – Werner Sombart. To Sombart, the expansion of capital is referred not only to the quantitative gain materialized in terms of assets of money or machinery, but also about ways of organizing and managing labour, machine, technology and information (Sombart, 2001:11-13). This is a critique on the narrow interpretation of capitalism as only an economic system as well as a new observation concerning the nature of capitalism – a system of exploration.

This view was shared by two equally important scholars in the twentieth century, namely Joseph Schumpeter and Daniel Bell. In the hands of Joseph Schumpeter, the insight was encapsulated in a more explicit formulation by the concept of ‘entrepreneur’. Schumpeter gives credits to the ‘entrepreneur’ for bringing out

new ways of making and organizing things and for breaking up the static economic situation.⁹ In his own words, the function of ‘entrepreneur’ is “to reform or revolutionize the pattern of production by exploiting an invention or, more generally, an untried technological possibility new way, by opening up a new source of supply of materials or a new outlet for products, by reorganizing an industry and so on” (Schumpeter, 1976: 132). In this sense, the question of whether capitalism is a closed or open system is very much dependent on how well the entrepreneurial function is carried out. Although Schumpeter also recognized that capitalism is always under the influence of static equilibrium, the self-propelling nature of capitalism at the same time generates the need to fabricate ‘newness’ and to go beyond what already existed. That is why the exploratory dimension is assigned to the ‘entrepreneur’, a factor alongside capital, labour and land as one of the four essential factors of the economic system. To Schumpeter, the function of change has already been built into the system of capitalism, which is capable not only of facing changes but also taking initiative to be a motor of change.

For Daniel Bell, Sombart’s theme of ‘acquisitiveness’ was rephrased as the other face of Weber’s ‘Protestant ethics’, playing an equally important role in the dynamics

⁹ Schumpeter, started out from a presupposition of a static state of equilibrium, in which the economic situation is stagnant, with no further profit can be generated.

of the 'double bind of capitalism' (Bell, 1996: 292). According to the principle of 'acquisitiveness', "there are no absolute limits to acquisition, and the system exercises a psychological compulsion to boundless extension..." (Bell, 1996: 292). Although hedonism, when this principle is extended to the areas of consumption, was perceived with equal distaste as that of the bureaucratic rationalism by Bell, the acquisitive principle allows Bell to construe capitalism as 'a mentality or spirit' because capitalism in the cultural sense began with "the rising awareness of and excitement about new worlds open to exploration and wealth beyond the confined spaces of the older European, and the emphasize on the individual, rather than on the collectivity, as the relevant actor on the historical stage" (Bell, 1996: 285). The juxtaposition of 'exploration' and 'individualism' as a mentality or spirit is actually an extended interpretation of Schumpeter's concept of entrepreneur. This is critically important for our reconstruction of the concept of creativity because 'self-realization' is emphasized in the quest of boundless exploration. In Bell's own words, "individual and his or her self-realization is the new ideal and image of life, and that one can remake society and remake oneself in an effort to realize new individual goals" (Bell, 1996: 286). This self-realization entails a dimension of 'expression', which is presupposed in all forms of creativity, that the human potential can thus be realized. Hans Joas had undertaken a review of this

philosophical idea (Joas: 1996) and gave credit to the German philosopher Johann Gotfried Herder for emphasizing the ‘active and individual character’ of the concept.¹⁰ The importance of Bell’s interpretation lies mainly in re-locating the dimension of expression in the hands of the ‘entrepreneur’, opening up possibility for capitalism to incorporate the ‘active character’ of creativity.

In sum, in the alternative readings of capitalism of Sombart, Schumpeter and Bell, we can notice that the origin of capitalism might well come from a source in sharp contrast to Weber’s historical reading. The acquisitive principle and the concept of ‘entrepreneur’ show that favourable conditions are not totally absent for exploration, experiment and creativity. We also get support from the interpretation of the above thinkers that capitalism is more than just an economic mode of organization: capitalism possesses a cultural dimension – a primary source for the cultivation of creativity.

The second resource is from Karl Marx. We have come to a conclusion in the

¹⁰ “On the contrary, inherently in Herder’s emphasis on the active and individual character of each person’s self-realization is the idea that it is only in our utterances and actions that we recognize our own potentiality. We accept a greater or lesser part of what we generate spontaneously as an appropriate expression of our being and accord this expression a level of recognition which we deny to other parts. It is only in the same process in which we realize ourselves that we become aware of the self that we are realizing.” (Joas, 1996: 81)

exposition along the profit perspective that, for Marx and the fellow Marxists, the capitalist system is contradictory in its nature and there is no room left for creativity under the logic of capital accumulation. The reason is simply that the replacement of living labour by dead labour narrows the base from which surplus value can be drawn.¹¹ It is the expansion process itself contradictorily leads to its unwanted outcome – there are few left and waited for exploitation into profit. However, it is also this contradictory character gives us hint that the possibility for creativity is not totally extinct. The fact that capital is in need of ‘something’ for the processing of further profit reveals a realm that is a prerequisite for the system to function. This realm is none but the ‘life power’ of the human labour, but it is often reduced to become a factor of production and serves only the purpose of capital accumulation as a source upon which all profit can be produced.

For Marx, if put to its full use in an ideal situation, this ‘life power’ of human labour can bring not only “the fulfillment of the individual actor through his action, but also of the productive activity of all interlocking to form a producing and self-enjoying community” (Joas, 1996: 92). However, the production relationship

¹¹ Capital cannot be a source of surplus because the competitive bidding process will in the long run eliminate any difference between the price of capital and their monetary worth for the capitalist who owns them. Therefore, the ability of a given sum of capital to yield surplus value must fall. This is famously portrayed by Marx’s section on “the falling rate of profit” in *Capital*.

is distorted by capitalism, creating an ‘alienated’ condition far distant from the ideal of a mutually beneficial community. In Marx’s view, it is a fault due to the capitalist relationship rather than production itself. In a utopian portrait of the mutually beneficial community, “each of us would have doubly affirmed himself and his neighbour in his production”.¹² For the purpose of our reconstructing the concept of creativity, we can take note that production itself does not necessarily entail the suffocation of creativity. There were quite a lot of attempts made by different scholars after Marx, along this line of thinking, trying in theory to resurrect the production relationship and a mutually beneficial community as portrayed by Marx (Arnason, 1990; Heller, 1985; Honneth, 1982; and Habermas, 1984).¹³ But for Marx, there is no space left for any development of creativity under the capitalist relationships, the only way out is to revolt.

If expression cannot bring to its fruition and production cannot bring along with it a mutually productive and self-enjoying community in capitalism, the channeling of human potential can turn into outbursts that might disrupt the existing relationships.

This is the third face of creativity. This was also the choice for Marx. He

¹² In the “*Excerpts from James Mill’s Elements of Political Economy*” [1844], cited in Joas, 1996: 92.

¹³ The most notable is the attempt proposed by Habermas: making use of the theory of the ‘ideal speech situation’ to fabricate a kind of communicative action for the attainment of a life-world free of the hassles of alienation.

predicted the downfall of capitalism as technology advancing into the next mode of production. But the history of capitalism continued and Marx's prediction was seen rather as a self-fulfilling prophecy in the political history. History shows that technology or the mode of production is not the sufficient reason for revolutionary actions.

The other prerequisite lies somewhere at the 'consciousness' of the participants and it is the intention to act in and for 'freedom' that makes revolution possible. Marx, in his various attempts to understand revolutions in the 19th century, took account of "very widely ranging elements of the self-understanding process as mediated through symbols, or conflict conveyed by symbol. He knows very well that the interests of a class cannot be translated directly and mechanistically into goals of action, but that possible interests can give the class a subjectively felt sense of purpose only through a process of self-definition and identity formation" (Joas, 1996: 111). This understanding is critical for our developing the notion of creativity because it clarifies that the consciousness to revolt, to create and to free oneself is a 'self-definition' process and it can be 'organized' or 'mobilized' in spite of the general unfavourable condition of technology.

Although the concept of 'class consciousness' was not developed theoretically further by Marx, its importance was fully recognized by the neo-Marxists like Georg Lukacs, Gramsci and Hannah Arendt. They arrived at the similar understanding that "revolutionary action means acting in freedom...It can signify both the creation of that freedom and also action taken under conditions of already created freedom" (Joas, 1996: 115). Creativity, the expression of human potential, if manifested in its full revolutionary intent, can bring not only the recovery of 'life power' but a wholesale renewal of the existing structure of the society. Here it suffices for us to note that capitalism, though generating a condition not totally favourable to the cultivation of creativity, does not possess the full power to prohibit the outgrowth of 'life power'. Nevertheless, there are always leakages in the system for 'life power' to strategically turn to its favour, especially when the 'consciousness' of the participants is properly 'organized'. Following the above exposition, we can say that the energy and intensity of creativity is captured well enough by the notion of 'revolution', which entails the capability of creativity to develop, to grow and to induce changes even in unfavourable conditions.

The last source should be credited to Max Weber. He made use of the term 'charisma' to refer to those who are ascribed with extra-ordinary powers. In his

own words, charisma is “a quality of a personality generally considered out of the ordinary... on account of which its bearer is looked upon as possessed of supernatural or superhuman, or at least specifically unusual, power or qualities, which are not accessible to the ordinary person” (Weber, 1968: 241). The ‘revolutionary intent’ as we mentioned previously also manifests well in the quality of extra-ordinariness, allowing its capability to transcend all of the ordinary. Moreover, in view of Weber, charisma is the source of innovation and creativity because it is capable of giving a new order in the disruption of the old one and, most important of all, it questions at the plane of meaning in its agenda of a new set of substantive values and beliefs. This is the dimension particular to the concept of charisma and it is well captured in the concept of ‘vision’: it is ‘meaning-oriented’ and it is always driven by some substantive values. The dimension of ‘vision’ is particularly important for our reconstruction of the concept of creativity because the ‘revolutionary intent’ can thus be ‘organized’ by means of some substantive values. It is also because it works at a symbolic level, intervening at the plane of consciousness of the participants, that a ‘felt sense of purpose’ can be achieved.

For Weber, it generates tension to the existing structures, especially those aligned in

a bureaucratic format. Bureaucracy, structured along hierarchical lines and bound by elaborated rules and regulation, is in sharp contrast to the quality of charisma. The tension erupts most dramatically in the moment of initiation because not only the abstract rules of bureaucracy will be discarded in the process but also the routinized tendency can come to a halt. Thus, it can well be a remedy for the 'routinization' problem of bureaucracy. So, the wholesale rationalization of the capitalist system, though pervasive in its scale, is kept in check by the charismatic forces. They serve as a favourable condition for the cultivation of creativity not only by breaking order, but also by enabling participants to envision a shared purpose. In other words, creativity, by way of 'charisma', can be organized into a movement capable of renewing the existing relationships. It is in this sense that disorderly behaviours acted out in the name of charisma can be put into positive function.

However, Weber has also painted a pessimistic picture of capitalism by foretelling that the energy and novelty of charisma would soon wane in face of the routinization process.¹⁴ Quite a few scholars in the Weberian tradition try to rectify this pessimism of Weber, most notably the works of Edward Shils and S. N.

¹⁴ A process through which 'a great upsurge of charismatic vision loses, at it were, its initial impetus and becomes flattened, diffused, and in a sense obliterated'. (Eisenstadt, 1995: 175)

Eisenstadt (Shils, 1982; Eisenstadt, 1995; see also Schluchter, 1981). Eisenstadt tries to locate the charisma from the chair of the person to the office, thus continuing the function of charisma.¹⁵ Shils' concept of 'centrality' is more relevant to us in the sense that it points to the integrative function of charisma "because it promises in some instance, to provide a new and better order, one more harmonious with the more inclusive and deeper order of existence" (Shils, 1982: 128). This is the other face of the concept of charisma: its order-giving character. Following Shils, the tension between the formalized delineation of rationality in the concept of bureaucracy and the power of regenerating order in the concept of charisma might well be understood as a socio-cultural process in which the dynamics of bureaucracy and creativity can be integrated.

If the pathway of Sombart, Schumpeter and Bell emphasizes expression and self-realization as the purpose of creativity, the 'revolutionary intent' of creativity is well captured by Marx's notion of 'revolution' and Weber's concept of 'charisma'.

All these concepts serve to enrich creativity by not only clarifying the meanings of 'expression', 'production' and 'revolution', but establish a theoretical relation to the

¹⁵ By way of the sub concept of 'charisma of the office', it denotes the process through which "the charismatic characteristics are transferred from the unique personality or the unstructured group to orderly institutional reality. (Eisenstadt, 1995: 175)

concept of capitalism. They point to the fact that capitalism, though generally understood as a rational profit-generating system, always carries with it some other forces. Those forces, i.e. the incessant quest to explore and experiment, the human potential of labour, the 'revolutionary intent' and the charismatic power are all favourable conditions for the development of creativity.

2.4 The Research Question, Approach and Hypotheses

After the review of how some important scholars in the tradition of sociological thoughts looked at the problem of capitalism: as both a rationalized profit-gearing system and a platform ready for exploration into the unknown and to produce changes, the research question of this study can be formulated as follows: How is it possible for creativity to emerge and function in a capitalist organization? This study tries to answer this question by way of an investigation of an advertising agency in Hong Kong. In the following, I will explain why I have chosen advertising as the research case, clarify my approach, explain key concepts and lay out the hypotheses for the study.

Advertising has long been an important issue in the literature concerning the advance of modernity as well as industrialism (Ewen, 1976; Williams, 1980; Packard, 1981; Baudrillard, 1988; Galbraith, 1962). Raymond Williams asserted that the rise of the Industrial Revolution triggered off the need for mass advertising, because “with the coming of factory production large-scale advertising became economically necessary” (Williams, 1980: 173). On the one hand, the new era brought in new impetuses for promotion and advertising on a large scale, thus changing the nature of advertising from basically a ‘words-of-mouth’ and

‘at-the-spot’ activities into a service selling to the advertiser-clients for the purpose of attracting the mass public into consumption. On the other hand, from a Marxist position, advertising on a large scale speeded up the process of circulation and accelerated the logic of capital accumulation, resulting in a faster development of capitalism (Baudrillard, 1988; Galbraith, 1969; Baran and Sweezy 1966). More specifically, the growth of capitalism is achieved through an expansion of the ‘sales effort’, organized around “the advertising, research, development of new product varieties, services, etc., which are the usual means for fighting for market share” (Baran and Sweezy, 1966: 117). Arguably the most important of this ‘sales effort’, advertising has increasingly occupied a dominant role by incorporating other parts of the ‘sales effort’ into its structure. Nowadays, the advertising work of a normal ‘4A advertising agency’ includes not only the creative services and the production and placement of advertisements, but also strategic planning, media analyses, researches and other promotional activities on the behalf of the clients. As shown, the importance, as well as the scale, of advertising is closely related to the development of capitalism.

Although there are quite a lot of studies written on advertising, most of them tackle the subject from the point of view of cultural history (Marchand, 1985; Richards,

1990; Lears, 1994; Martin, 1996; Pope, 1983), documenting the relationships between advertising and society. This perspective rests on the presupposition that advertising is a direct mirror of society. Other studies (Barthes, 1977/1983; Berger, 1972; Leiss, Kline & Jhally 1990; Goffman, 1979; Williamson, 1978), including most of the analyses done under the disciplines of semiology and cultural studies, challenge and modify this presupposition and give attention to the ‘signification process’ involved in the production and consumption of advertising. But both start from the premise that advertisements per se are the unit of analysis for their studies. As Michael Schudson, the famous mass media analyst, commented, “Most criticism of advertising is written in ignorance of what actually happens inside these [advertising] agencies” (Schudson, 1984: 45). Echoing Schudson, this dissertation differs from the above perspectives by seeing advertising as a social and cultural process that involves different people interacting with each other for the purpose of making advertising products and launching advertising campaigns. This approach can appropriately fulfill the research task of analyzing creativity in an organizational environment, with workplace and the interaction process of a 4A advertising agency as the focus of study in the research. It is microscopic in its nature and the focus is on what people actually do in an advertising agency.

The choice of an advertising agency is also not arbitrary. The study begins from the recognition that the organization of work in making the advertising products is capitalist in form. This means that basically the sets of rules underlying organizations in the sphere of the so-called 'culture industry' are related to those generally associated with the capitalist work process. There we can find capitalism, embodied in an organizational form, expressing itself as a rationalized industry specializing on the production of 'culture' for the purpose of perpetuating consumption. However, advertising, and other culture industry as well, complicates the work process by including a creative stage which, as a workplace, is organized along lines quite unlike the industrial process generally characterizing conventional capitalist organizations. It is further complicated by the fact that the production of creativity involves a mentality, or culture, quite different from the mode of rationality needed for acquiring profit and administration. In other words, the case of an advertising agency is a field orchestrating with different and competing forces: some are functioning to conserve the organization for the purpose of profit and order and others are at work to counteract it for the purpose of creativity. This makes an advertising agency a very good case for our research problem of how is it possible for creativity to emerge and function in the context of a capitalist organization.

Capitalism is here defined, following Marx and Weber, as both a profit-oriented economic system and a rationalized structure with prescribed sets of rules aligned on a hierarchical basis. Accordingly, the *capitalist organizations* are those societal units basically organizing themselves in a rationalized format for, or at least abiding by, the purpose of profit. Structurally speaking, the rationalized organization expresses itself as a *bureaucracy*, with a hierarchy of offices organized in a prescribed order into several departments, operating according to the principle of efficiency. In this study, the form of an advertising agency is basically modeled on that of the capitalist organization, with both *profit* and *order* as the two main organizing principles in its operation.

Apart from *profit* and *order*, *creativity* is also a definitive feature of an agency's success. It first of all concerns the capability and capacity of an advertising agency to bring forth new ideas in the production of advertisements and advertising campaigns. It includes, naturally, the core activities of creative practice, i.e. idea planning, copywriting, visualization, etc., in its scope but extending also to cover all of the *creative resources* an agency possesses. Creative resources can be referred to the sum total of its creative capacity, i.e. manpower, products and achievements and to the

ability or capability of an agency to *innovate*.¹⁶ Therefore, apart from being defined as a set of practice and creative resources, creativity refers also to the '*innovativeness*' of an organization, especially in relation to the issues of flexibility and change.

The purpose of this study is to answer the leading research question by way of an investigation of an advertising agency. On the one hand, I am going to describe and explain how an advertising agency presents itself as a capitalist organization and generates tension to the practice of creativity. On the other hand, I will try to locate and examine the social processes at work to foster a favourable environment for the cultivation of creativity. The investigation basically centers around three sets of guiding questions:

1. How an advertising agency expresses itself as a capitalist organization, according to the two organizing principles of profit and order? What kinds of tensions does it produce to the practice of creativity? To what extent does the Marxist

¹⁶ The two terms of creativity and innovation are somehow used interchangeably in a not precise way in the contemporary management literature. But creativity usually refers to the putting forth, the discovery, the birth of new ideas and innovation relates more to the practical dimension: the application of the new ideas. Miller has made a distinction between the two: "creativity is the birth of imaginative new ideas, whereas innovation is the transformation of those new ideas into tangible, practical products, services, or business practices" (1986: 5). I basically follow the distinction and prefer the term of creativity since my study mainly concerns about the capability, as well as capacity, of an individual, a group of individuals and an organization in bringing forth new ideas. But the term innovation has a stronger connotation of transformation in relations to the issue of change. So, the terms of innovation and innovativeness will also be used throughout the study when the referent is obviously related the problem of changes.

‘alienation’ thesis serve as an explanation? Is ‘routinization’ and ‘inertia’ a problem in an advertising agency?

2. Is creativity possible in an advertising agency? What are the conditions for cultivating creativity in an advertising agency? Are there any strategies, devices or platforms functioning to offset the pressures generated out of the need for profit and order? What are the roles played by the leaders in an advertising environment? What kind of leadership is it? How does it organize creativity in a capitalist organization?

3. What are the conditions for such kind of leadership to emerge? In what ways does this kind of leadership affect the advertising business at the organizational and institutional levels? How does it bring forth changes and new opportunities?

In this thesis, I will argue that creativity in a capitalist organization is a difficult but possible pursuit. The whole thesis tries to demonstrate that the practice of creativity, being a common practice all over the advertising business, concerns not only the capacity, i.e. manpower and technology, of an organization but also the

capability to bring forth new ideas and changes. This is very much dependent on the question of how creativity is being organized. Making use of the empirical findings and field data in a case of an advertising agency, the research tries to locate and examine the ‘agent’ that functions to organize creativity in a capitalist organization. Special attention will be given to the Weberian concept of ‘charisma’. It helps to explain the special kind of leadership as found in the research case – the charismatic leadership: a high-energy, flexible and vision-oriented platform that can effectively organize creativity and bring forth changes. This platform might well serve as an important reference for future studies on organizational changes.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 The Research Process and Data Sources

The study¹⁷ was based on fieldwork research between March and October in the year of 2001. The primary empirical sources for the study were mainly derived from observation notes and interview recordings in the fieldwork period. Apart from that, primary sources also included some newspaper cutting posted around or stored in the advertising agency, the memos circulated publicly within the agency, the TV and film archive and some company's standards like the corporate handbook, the creative briefs, the account planning briefs, etc.

The basic methods and techniques used in the research were participant observation and in-depth interviewing. While in the field, I observed, listened to, questioned, and talked with a large number of men and women who were employed by the company for some core advertising works, which included getting projects from clients on the one hand and creating and designing advertising materials on the

¹⁷ All the names used for people and the agency are pseudo names for the sake of protecting confidentiality of the respondents.

other. So the focus of the research includes activities like dealing and negotiating with clients, strategic planning of advertising projects, implementing and carrying out promotional activities, writing and designing copy and visual materials for the advertisements, brain-storming sessions and evaluating campaigns and advertising materials.

Although the process of research mainly followed these two sets of core activities in an advertising agency, other aspects in the daily routine also drew my attention to some interesting as well as important information concerning the particularity of this advertising agency. These other aspects include 'free' time activities, which recurrently appear in various slots of 'break' time, for instances 'lunch break', 'coffee break', etc. and in the leisure hours when staff there finished a day's work. Although such information might not necessarily relate to the core activities of the advertising practice in the agency, they provide valuable sources of data concerning the characteristics as well as the underlying dispositions of the 'person' who work there. They allow me to construct, aside from an analysis of an abstract organizational system, a more concrete portrait of those who work there and how they think and feel when they are at work or not at work.

3.2 Biographical Note

It is impossible to divorce this research project from my career history. Before embarking on an academic career, I had spent years in the media industry, including job positions like a scene-continuity supervisor in the film industry, an assistant TV producer in a government broadcast network, an editor in a publishing house and an assistant manager in an entertainment area. But none of these jobs gave me direct access to the advertising business. Although there were chances to associate with people in the advertising business, my interest in the business only started when I turned took up a my Master's degree programme in the School of Design in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. There were two sources of stimulation of my interest in the business. The first was the tutor role that I had to take to assist the undergraduate students in their assignments or projects. I began curious in how people of a totally different discipline think and do about some 'creativity' works. I also began to become interested in how a future visual maker was trained. The second, closely related to the first, was that I had the chance to talk and make friends with some guest speakers who were invited from outside the academia to give lectures to the students

These two sources, though yet giving me an 'insider' status, allowed me some

‘second-hand’ experiences of what an advertising business involved and the people who actually worked in it. This becomes a useful preparation for my research. First, they help me to interpret the empirical materials collected in the course of fieldwork. Second, my grasp of the usual ways of doing things in the advertising business allowed me to gain rapport with the informants. It also helped sensitize me to the practical and professional knowledge held by the subjects, particularly that relating to the rules of the advertising game.

3.3 Gaining Entry and Gaining Trust

My background facilitated my entry to the field. The key person, in fact the executive creative director of the company, was introduced to me by my advisor in the Master's degree programme. I had a first meeting with him in the early months of 2000 and he quickly promised to support my access. When I was busy doing the preparation work in the following months, spoken assurances were more than once given by the executive creative director through telephone contacts. By the first month of the year of 2001, a research schedule was drafted (see Appendix A and B) and sent to Phoenix and I received a phone call two weeks later telling me formally that I was allowed to research on the advertising agency. In the last week of March, I started going to the field.

I gained an appointment from the executive creative director on the first day in the field and he gave me a brief introduction of the agency while walking me through the whole company. It seemed like I was a new staff in the company. Although right at this very beginning moment I was introduced as a research student who would write something on this company for a postgraduate degree, I found out later I had to restate my identity again and again in the first few weeks to let them have a firm grasp of my identity. The walking through was very brief and short and I

was given a place to settle down and do my research. Faces were all new, except that I finally recognized a past student of the School of Design, who was now a copywriter in the company. I had a little chat with him but his reaction was far from enthusiastic.

Although the people who worked there showed no annoyed feelings about my entry, unenthusiastic attitude was generally adopted by people who worked there, especially by staff members in the “above-the-line” section in the creative department. People I met in the first two weeks in the account planning department could easily adapt to my intrusion with their skillful interpersonal techniques: kindness and courtesy were well maintained in face of an outsider like me. But they were also the ones who needed my repeated clarification of my identity. People in the creative department, on the contrary, remembered quite well my history but generally adopted a ‘cool’ attitude in their treatment of outsiders. The “below-the-line” section¹⁸ in the creative department was an exception. They were generally younger, and more prone to talk and play. In the first few weeks of

¹⁸ In the advertising business, the creative department is usually structured along the “above-the-line” and the “below-the-line” sections, with the former tailored to the production of advertisements for television, newspaper and magazine commercials and the latter tailored to the production of placement advertisements and on-site promotion. Generally speaking, the “below-the-line” section, involving a lower production cost, is the training ground for the new comers.

my entry, they were the first 'group' I became associated with.

The key for 'breaking the ice' in the "above-the-line" section was provided, unexpectedly, by the support officer of the creative department. She was responsible for the scheduling work of the creative department and acted also informally as the personal secretary of the two executive creative directors. She was the real mediator. It was to a great extent because of her help that I could finally get familiar with the "above-the-line" section in just two weeks' time. But the real trust was gained very slowly and became consolidated only after some trial interviews. I think the exercises of 'deep talk' served not only as a tool for me to know more about them but also dispelled their doubt about me as any kind of 'spy'.

The trust issue for the top managerial level, contrary to expectation, was far easier and worked very smoothly as I proceeded to the trial formal interviews in the second month of the research. It seemed like they were waiting for me to take initiative. For example, one executive creative director, in the first interview, was very forthcoming in revealing his own understanding of his relationship with the other executive creative director and the regional director. To the top management, why I was there was very clear and understandable and they knew right from the

very beginning that the purpose of my being there was purely academic. The only concern which they had was whether I could keep commercial confidentiality while doing my research. Although a formal promise was made in the 'asking for permission of entry' letter, I remembered one time I was reminded again of the commercial confidentiality in a brainstorming session. It was their sole concern. Generally, they were not afraid of talking about any kind of difficult matter, provided that their responsibility towards clients would not be hampered by any kind of careless mistakes made by an outsider researcher.

3.4 Roles

Formally, I was accepted and assigned the role of an observing researcher who was allowed to freely walk around the advertising agency to talk to people and make notes of anything useful to my study. In these six months, I was even given a temporary place to sit and watch and jot down field notes of my observations. Furthermore, I was allowed to interview people from various ranks in the company. Most interviews were far from structured and could be regarded as spontaneous in nature, meaning that people I had interviewed in those occasions were not prepared for being interviewed. Sometimes, they might just regard these as casual chats about daily office work. Nevertheless, there were also interviews that were much more formal, prepared and structured. Initially, they were targeted at the top managerial level of the company. They were later extended to people of lower ranks near to the third month when I became more focused on the details of the core activities of the company.

Although ‘participant observation’ was the main method used in the research, the perception of my role as an academic people did limit the possibility of my participation in the core activities of the company. I was sometimes allowed and invited to participate in some ‘creative’ and evaluation processes although I did not

have a position in the work hierarchy in the formal structure, which meant that I could have a glimpse of their work but no full access to the sort of experience that my informants had. The remedy for this partial participation was to involve as much as I can in the non-work or work-related aspects. So, accompanying the advertising people to eat and play, to walk and wander and to talk and chat in 'free' time period was no less important for me to gather information on what and how they felt and thought about work. However, like most researchers in similar field studies, I sometimes was hesitant to get too close with the informants fearing that empathy might weaken objectivity and empathy might affect my judgement of a particular person or event. I was also afraid of being too intrusive when I observed that people were busy doing their own jobs, hence having no time to 'entertain' me. This emotional difficulty of making a 'presence' was finally overcome when their perception of me as a 'pleasant' person was reconfirmed again and again in my bit by bit tiny trial intrusion into their daily work. There were occasionally rejections but no resentful feelings even when they were having troublesome moments.

3.5 My routine

My routine as a researcher basically followed the time schedule of the creative department, meaning that I might not arrive at the company nine sharp in the morning and leave at five thirty in the afternoon. Usually, I arrived around ten in the morning and left around seven in the afternoon. Sometimes I would stay longer to prolong my observation to see how the creative people worked overtime. I went to lunches with the creative people at around one in the afternoon and back around two to concentrate my observation in the busiest hours. It was also the time I would walk around the agency, in and out of the creative department, to spot somebody to talk to. Participation in various kinds of meetings and sessions was also undertaken in these afternoon hours if I was invited or accepted. Formal interviews were usually arranged three to four days earlier to tune in to informants' schedules on the one hand and give them time to prepare for these interviews on the other. These were sometimes done in the morning or around the lunch hour for these were the more relaxing time slots. Most formal interviews were about forty-five minutes long but the longest one lasted about one and a half hour. Nearly all the interviews were recorded in a digital recorder. When every one in the agency was too busy to talk to me, I would retreat to the place reserved for me to organize my observational notes or I went to the TV archive to review Phoenix's

past advertisements.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

4.1 The Context: Advertising Industry in Hong Kong

The situation of advertising in contemporary Hong Kong society can be characterized as “sophisticated, fast-paced and money-driven” (Martin, 1996: 52).

Ernest Martin, a famous scholar on the subject of Hong Kong advertising industry, reported that “the intense competition is unrivaled anywhere in the region – indeed, anywhere in the world...Advertisers are demanding and cut-throat business maneuvering among competitive agencies in common” (Martin, 1996: 52).

Beginning from the mid 1980's, the advertising industry in Hong Kong has developed at an unprecedented rate in terms of size as well as in composition.

Nearly all the big names in the advertising industry, for examples, Ogilvy & Mather, J. Walter Thompson, Leo Burnett, Saatchi & Saatchi, McCann-Erickson, etc., has expanded their business in Hong Kong and become the major players in the industry. They were all 4As (full services) company and snatched over 80 percent of the total advertising revenue (*Media*, 1994: 3). These multinational agencies

brought not only big capital into market, but also a pool of high quality creative resources that reshaped the Hong Kong advertising culture. Since then, smaller, Chinese-owned agencies were peripheralized, with no significant power or impact over the development of advertising industry in Hong Kong.

However, after 1997, as Hong Kong underwent the most difficult period economically as well as politically, there witnessed a retreat of the big multinationals in both capital and resources from the Hong Kong market. Hong Kong has traditionally serviced a bigger market as the gateway to China, but, as other cities like Shanghai and Beijing grew, the importance of Hong Kong was seriously weakened. “As there is a slowing economy and a growing number of companies relocating to China”, the atmosphere in the advertising industry can be characterized as a “belt-tightening” competition. (*Media*, 2001a: 12) This was further aggravated by the fact that the advertising agencies was in excess supply. Government data showed that in March 2001, there were 4,089 advertising and related establishments employing over 19,000 staff for a geographical area of only seven million people (*Media*, 2002a: 20).

The Hong Kong advertising industry is now in a difficult situation as there are too

many advertising agencies competing for a shrinking market. Redundancies, cost-cutting and downsizing by Hong Kong advertising agencies are now common. Competition is so intense that stories of over a dozen agencies lunging for an account are not rare. Being big is no longer a guarantee for an agency's success and the advantages generated out of economies of scale and consolidations of resources have now turned into its disadvantages.

We are now witnessing a period of transformation. Whereas the big multinational agencies begin their recovery after merger, acquisition and restructuring, the small ones begin to grow by specializing on personalized services. Opportunities are still available but size and money are no longer a determining factor as in the past. In such a situation, breaking out of mediocrity in terms of creativity has increasingly become the focus for the highly competitive advertising industry in Hong Kong. A strong and clear position in the creative policy is the last but safe resort to turn to.

4.2 The Profile of the Company

Phoenix¹⁹ is the regional branch of the Phoenix International, with 345 offices in 76 countries. The group's most famous international clients are Bayer and Pepsi, handled in over 60 countries each, while many of its regional agencies are among the most admired in their local market. A leading periodical in the industry, *Advertising Age*, ranked Phoenix International as the first agency network worldwide in 2002 with revenues of \$1.24 billion (*Advertising Age*, 2002: 4-5). Apart from the revenue figures, the company is also regarded as one of those agencies which are 'creativity-driven'. The emphasis on creativity is well shown by the company's motto: "At Phoenix, the three things we care about the most are Work, Work, Work. Nothing else matters but Work. But it's the story we tell that gives Work meaning". The Hong Kong branch Phoenix was established in 1974. It is relatively small in size, with about 100 employees in 2001, as compared to the regional branches of other international agencies. However, the agency has occupied a rather high position in the agency rankings of the advertising industry since 1998. In 2002, Phoenix was ranked number six in the ranking of agency groups in the Asia-Pacific region, with a remarkable score of 137 in terms of

¹⁹ Pseudonym to conceal the identity of the firm.

creativity performance out of a total of 396.²⁰ In the year 2000, Phoenix achieved a billing of US\$56 million and gained a total of 32 Creative Awards in the Asian Advertising Awards (*Media*, 2001b: 14), alongside Leo Burnett as one of the champions of the most creative agency of the year.

²⁰ The calculation of the score is based on three performance criteria: creativity, market share and business activity. The champion in the year of 2002 was Ogilvy & Mather, with the highest score achieved at 482. (*Media*, 2002b: 2))

4.3The Location

Phoenix is situated in the newly developing area in the district of Quarry Bay in the Hong Kong Island. In the past, the area was mainly populated by people of a lower to lower middle class in some very famous big but old buildings like Hoi Shan Mansion and Lai Sze Mansion. The history began to changes when the Taikoo Group began their reconstruction project of Taikoo Shing in the early 80's. This attracted many middle class residents as well as developers to move to this unexplored land. Many more private and semi-private estates began their construction there in the late 80's and early 90's. The area near to the Taikoo Shing private estates has now become a totally different landscape with groups of massive, new and high-rise buildings clustered around the hill slopes, extending across the King's Road, stretching down to the seaside area. The reclamation seaside area is so vast that it extended from the district of Quarry Bay down to the Sai Wan Hoi area, covering an area similar in size to the original Quarry Bay. Taikoo Shing had fastly grown to be one of the most populated private estates in Hong Kong and successfully established itself as a center of residential/consumption complex capable of distinguishing itself from the original environment.

However, the outlook of the environment near to the Quarry Bay side had not

much changed until the Taikoo's reconstruction project of the old commercial area, around the famous South China Morning Post building. It was planned in the late 80's and began construction in the early 90's. Within a few years, a group of pioneering buildings of the new Taikoo Place commercial complex made its appearance in 1995. The project is still going on, with more and more new buildings erected in the complex and old ones demolished or at least refurbished.

The original old area was characterized by a concentration of publishing and printing companies led by some big firms like the South China Morning Group, Toppan Moore Publishing and Printing and Mandarin Publishing. The industry structure of the area has changed a lot after the establishment of the Taikoo Place complex. It became more diverse. The publishing industry still has a big sharer in the new structure, but no longer as predominant as in the past. Banking and finance have a no smaller share in the composition, with those big financial companies like American Express taking the lead. Newly established industries like telecom services also make its appearance in the Taikoo Place area. The most famous is the PCCW Group (Hongkong Telecom before acquisition). Companies of promotional services like advertising and public relations also found the new area a very suitable place for business. In the case of advertising, there are a lot of

advertising agencies moving there. Big names include Phoenix Hongkong, Saatchi Hongkong and Grey Hongkong. The new composition shows that the nature of most of the industries there is service-oriented, marketing-driven, communication-based and interpersonal. It marks itself out from the Central commercial area, which is dominated by Banking services and old professions like law and accounting. It is also different from the area around the Admiralty district where government branches have spread all over the district.

The image of a new and 'upbeat' commercial district shows itself if what happens in the surrounding environment is also taken into consideration. Newly established bars and restaurants have replaced traditional food and store outlets to become eye-catchers in the area now. In the late afternoon of Friday and Saturday, the area near to the heart of the Taikoo Place complex (near to the old site of South China Morning Post building) is now closed off to vehicles and bars and restaurants nearby are allowed to put their chairs and tables on the pavement. This of course helps to create an atmosphere for entertainment in the area. Music and performances are scheduled which infuse this area with elements of entertainment, leisure and cultural taste. The area now is believed to be a potential market for leisure and entertainment comparable to that of the Lai Kwan Fong area in Central.

The rent of the residential surroundings has of course gone up a lot in recent years, especially the rent of the shop floors, most of which are leased to restaurants and bars for businesses which meet the needs of this vibrant, up-beating commercial area.

4.4 The Floor

Phoenix is located on the 35th floor of the Dorset House in the giant commercial complex of Taikoo Place. The floor is square in shape, but the interior design of the company gives an impression of a circular flow motion if one walks through the company. This has to do with the wave-like design of some parts of the interior and the arrangements of the wall partitions.

The reception area is characterized by a wave-shape design with a counter opposite to the doorways of four elevators placed right at the inverted side of the crust. To its right, there is also a long lounge table with sofa placed for people waiting for introduction. Although there are two entrances located at the two sides of the reception area, people would always be led officially through the entrance next to the reception counter into the company. This is the official doorway. The other entrance, a password-protected automatic sliding glass door, is used as often as the official doorway. Preferences for using this password entrance is less a reason of serving a shortcut to some workplaces of the staff, but more because it can skip the area of the top management circle situated near to the entrance of the official doorway.

If one enters by the official doorway, the first impression is that there are some very big rooms along the winding corridor. First comes a very big conference room with a smaller room attached to its left. Turning round a corner, one arrives at the top management circle, with the room of the regional director at the end of a less winding pathway and a special room reserved for the overseas branch next to it. Then comes a big room shared by the two executive creative directors. Opposite it, there is a production room used for simple editing and previewing.

The creative department comes right after the big room of the executive creative director. The center space of the department is divided by some removable wall partitions which are just above the shoulders of a person with an average height. People working in the four partitioned space can easily communicate and chat with one another. A group of small rooms are arranged semi-circling the space of the center. They are rooms of the creative directors and assistant creative directors, with only the exception of the biggest lying at the end of the corridor used for central computer devices. There is also some space lying at the other side of the partitioned area. There is a room used for the storage of filmic advertising materials, including works of past glories and reference materials. Next to it, there is a partitioned space reserved for the support officer of the creative department.

The lady working there takes up a very important role of mediating day-to-day relationships between the executive creative directors and the creative department on the one hand and between the creative department and other departments on the other hand.

Although the interior design gives the impression that he or she is circling around the agency, the floor of the building is actually square in shape. As one leaves the creative department and takes the first turning around the corner of the floor, there is a straight corridor. To its left, there lies the doorway of the password entrance, followed by the male and female restrooms. To its right, there are two big rooms, one used for print and layout production and the other reserved for the accounting and finance matters. The production room is a place frequently visited by the creative people as well as the account planning people because samples and models before final release are usually output there.

Turning the second corner of the floor, once again one finds oneself trapped by partition arrangements. The number of partitions is more than the previous visited area and the walls there are higher than those found in the creative department. Right at the center, there is a partitioned space that is reserved for the

“below-the-line” section of the creative department. Facing the entrance of this space lays two rooms which also belong to the staff of the creative department: one to the creative director of the “below-the-line” section, another to the senior art director – the “number two” of the “below-the-line” section. There are also some partitioned area scattered around the “below-the-line” core but they are for the rank-and-file who work for the account planning section.

There are two interesting spaces that lie at this third interior face of the floor. The first one is a big separated area lying right at the beginning of the corridor. This is an area sub-leased to a related but executively independent company. No work of Phoenix involves the participation of this independent company, so the formal interaction with this company is scant. Right after the end of the corridor, near to the turning corner into the fourth interior face, there is a “store room” which serves informally as the only allowable area for smoking. It is a small room, with only a few chairs inside. Although seniors possessing private rooms can also smoke in their own space, this tiny space attracts quite a lot of visits by the staff. The frequency of the visits is quite high, even though the duration of most of the visits is quite short-lived.

Entering into the fourth interior face needs only a 45 degree turning and the space there is triangular in shape. The space there is used by the accounting planning people. The rooms for the two business directors are located at the two ends of the base of the triangle, with five partitioned area inhabited by the senior account planning staff. The junior staff is grouped near to the tip of the triangle, which is also partitioned. It occupies the center area of the triangle, leaving only a comparatively narrower corridor for passage. Here we can notice that the core area of the account planning department is comparatively smaller and less favorable than what we have found in the area occupied by the creative people. There are only two real rooms, the business directors', walled with large glass windows and provided with doors to give their occupants some privacy.

Leaving the account planning department and following a short winding corridor, one would soon find the official entrance. Before completing this winding and circular movement, there is also a frequently visited space: the pantry. People come in there usually for water and drinks. Basic facilities like drinking machine, microwave oven, refrigerator, plates and mugs are all ready there. The impression there is neat, tidy and clean. The cleaning and the tidying are responsible for by a middle-aged lady who often stands by to help refill water and clean used glasses and

mugs. She is also responsible for some catering services, serving guests and the senior management staff. Turning to the left of the pantry, one would arrive again at the doorway of the official entrance.

4.5 The Structure of the Company

In many respects Phoenix follows what has become a common structure for advertising firms around the world. In most companies, the key figures are the company directors. They may not be involved in the day-to-day details of creating and conducting campaigns, but they are responsible for the recruitment and promotion of key personnel, and are often involved in obtaining key clients. In Phoenix, the regional director watches over the business of the South-East region including areas covering Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia in the whole company and acts as the official leader of Hong Kong. A little bit down the hierarchical line, there are the two business directors and the two executive creative directors. At similar hierarchical level, they assume the responsibilities of looking after the two core sections of the agency, namely the account planning department and the Creative department.

Below the level of the directors, Phoenix breaks down into its several component parts. There are the account managers, representing the agency to clients, and the creative people, whose main job is to develop advertising materials. The former, leading the account planning department, focuses on the relationship between the agency and the clients. The work tasks include developing an advertising strategy,

project planning, creating advertisements, placing them and monitoring their effectiveness. The relationship with the client means that there is a premium on interpersonal skills and the ability to motivate a team. It is commonly said that advertising is a persuasion business and this persuasion actually begins from the initial stage of getting clients through frequent negotiations in the implementation process to the final release of the advertisements.

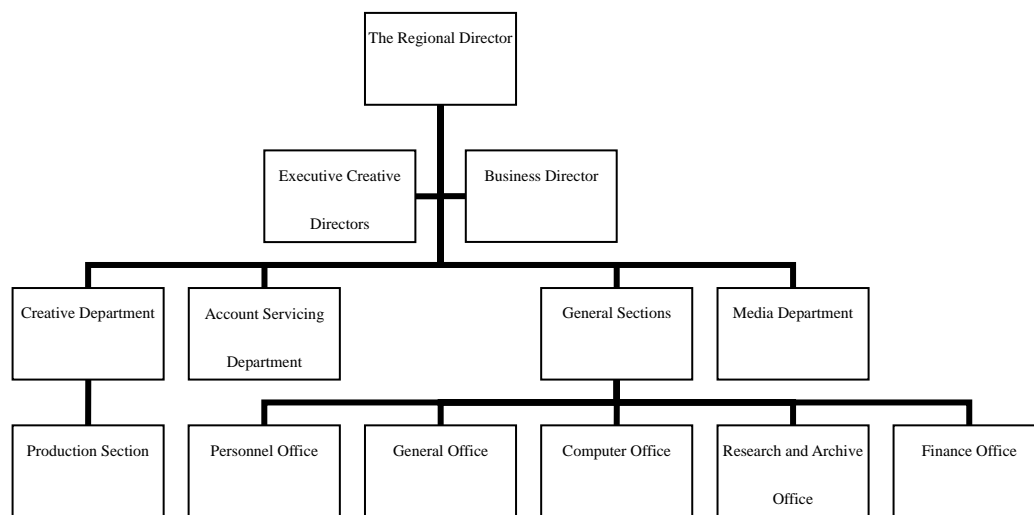


Figure 1 Organizational Chart of Phoenix, 2001.

In the account planning side, there are quite a lot of people classed in the middle managerial grade in the agency. There are five carrying the title of associate account director, each responsible for one to four major clients and directly accountable to the two business directors. Directly below them is the account manager grade. In Phoenix, there are only three persons carrying this title as compared to five in the upper hierarchical line and seven account executives in a

lower hierarchical line. The account manager, though lower in the official grade than the associate account director, can go straight to the business director. The title given to them is a kind of recognition for their ability to handle clients independently. Two out of the three account managers in Phoenix take full responsibilities of some smaller clients and they are directly accountable to the business director. Apparently, it is not normal for the middle strata to be bottle-necked with regard to efficiency concerns. However, it would be misleading to understand the real structure of an advertising agency if we follow the organizational model of a normal commercial firm.

Phoenix mainly follows the account planning tradition in the advertising business in arranging its organizational structure of the two core activities of the agency. The organization of the Account section tells at the same time how an agency manage their clients, so it would give us a shortcut to start from the client management structure in Phoenix. There are all together fourteen clients in the account system. They are first divided between the two business directors and then subdivided among the people in the middle managerial level, including both associate account director and account manager. Then there are several work groups formed for handling and implementing the client accounts, each consisting of two to five

members who might participate and work for more than one group at a time. The work groups formed are named after the name of each leader, who is normally given the final decision power next to the business director for issues concerning clients.

Besides this way of organizing, there is also the alternative way of grouping known as “work teaming”. This is a format formed after each particular campaign. There are several reasons for accounts services to be organized this way. The first reason is of course the flexibility that this kind of organization provides, in terms of allocating human resources. The most suitable personnel can then be mobilized to meet the particular needs of each campaign. For example, we can notice from the client management structure that there are all together three middle managerial group leaders responsible for handling a big account (Banking Service). It does not imply that the power each has over the account is in conflict or that they would join together in every campaign of this big client. It only means that they might be assigned the projects of this account and take responsibilities of handling the issues of each particular campaign. They might join together but it depends on the size and budget of each campaign. The work team format also allows flexibility in handling additional demands from the clients. There are also

possibilities, drawing from the same example of the big bank client, for the client to initiate two to three campaigns at the same time and this concept of serial campaigns might not be a very coherent and systematic idea right at the planning stage. The work team format is capable of handling those kinds of demands by forming an additional work team to cater to their additional needs, serial or parallel campaigns alike. It is a kind of risk buffer, in face of the incessant demand of the competitive market, by reallocating and redeploying human resources.

Apart from the people from the account planning department, there are also people from the creative department participating in each work team. Although the people from the account planning department nominally take the pioneering task of negotiating with the clients, they are far from the real decision makers in Phoenix. It is mainly because of the predominance of the two executive creative directors in the determination of the overall strategy for the whole agency and their active participation in and control over the implementation process concerning 'creative' work tasks.

These two executive creative directors, though occupying a position next to top managerial and sharing managerial power with both the regional director and the

two business directors, still retain the title of executive creative director, implying that they would not retreat to only the managerial circle and confine themselves to the overall planning of the agency. They would like to be perceived as an active motivator and leader regarding works of a creative nature. It does not mean that all the ideas for advertising campaigns are come from them, but their active participation in the idea developing process and their control on the evaluation process enables them to have a firm grasp of the production of each advertising project. Their influence can be shown by the fact that the balance between the account planning people and the creative people in each work team always leans over to the latter. The leaning does not mean that the latter is given more official power than that of the former; but it does reveal that the assertion of autonomy over 'creative' matter as initiated by the two executive creative directors is communicated to their fellow staff. It is commonly agreed in the advertising world that there are basically two approaches to categorize the character of the agency: the account-based or the creative-driven and their distinction is actually dependent on how much autonomy be granted to the creative branch in face of the client's demand. Phoenix is very close to the creative-driven model.

The power of the creative leaders can also be shown by many examples of how

they relate to the clients and how they sometimes skip or override opinions and decisions of the business directors. Skipping formal practice, clients of long term relationship might directly approach the creative directors for ideas in advertising campaigns as well as in marketing strategy. The business directors, though bearing a position officially similar to the creative leaders, are perceived only as the third link in the hierarchical line. The power of the two executive creative directors is so influential that the overall planning of the agency and the decisions concerning business direction are regarded as part of their responsibility. The high power granted to these two creative leaders is partly out of admiration and partly because of the personal relations to the regional director, who is also initiated into the company by these two directors

The organization of the creative department in Phoenix mainly follows the format of the client management structure, with four to seven client accounts assigned to each creative group. Similar to the organization in the account planning department, they are rearranged into work teams in each advertising campaign, but the arrangement is even more flexible than the account planning section. To illustrate, there are two big client accounts that are placed at the assigned client list of the six creative groups. That means on the one hand there are many jobs

coming from these two big clients, so every creative group may have a chance to handle with these clients. It shows on the other hand that work tasks of a 'creative' nature may not be as exclusive and particular as what is commonly believed to be, though the client's preferences for some creative staff may affect the decision of assigning work projects.

The advertising industry is one which often uses the term 'creative' to describe the group of staff whose responsibility is to translate the client's demand into advertising products, but a further categorization can be distinguished according to the nature of the work tasks. Basically, there are people who are specialized in visual aspects and be regarded as 'art-based' and people who are specialized in writing and texts and they are often referred to be 'copy-based'. The titles are different until they are promoted to the middle level to become assistant creative director (ACD) and creative director (CD). On entry, the art-based people are assigned the title of assistant art directors (AAD) and the copy-based people are assigned the title of copywriter (CW). They could be promoted to be senior art director (SAD), art director (AD) and senior copywriter (SCW) respectively in one to three years, depending on their performance. In Phoenix, there are six persons bearing the titles of CD or ACD and around twenty persons working in lower

creative titles, comprising a total of twenty-six in the creative department as compared to a staff of only eighteen persons in the account planning department.

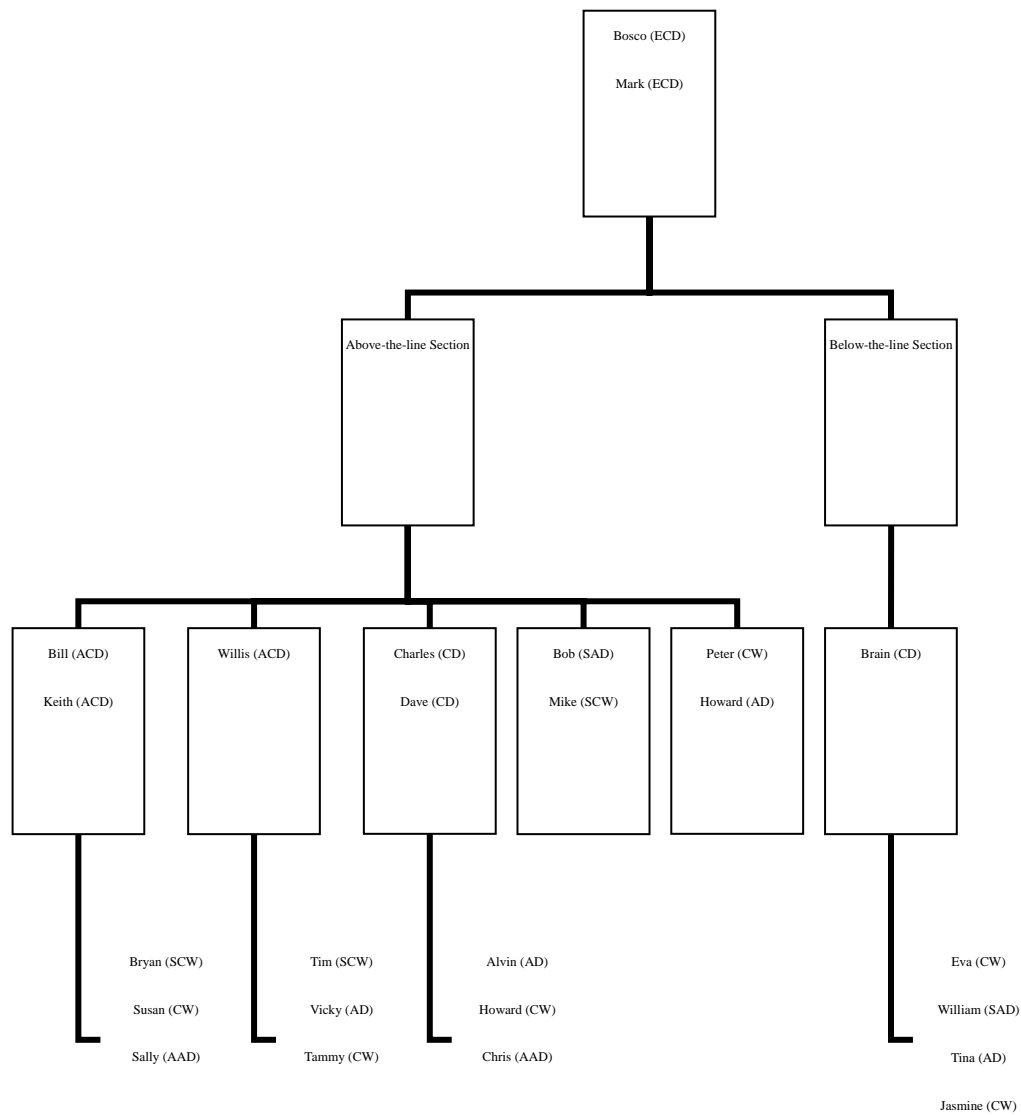


Figure 2 Structure of the Creative Department in Phoenix, 2001.

Creative people can also be divided into the “above-the-line” section and the “below-the-line” section, with the former specializing in work clustered around

major media like television, newspaper and magazine print advertisements, and the latter on promotion and advertising materials facilitating the former or tailoring for the minor media. The balance leans in the direction of the “above-the-line” side and we can observe from Phoenix that there is only one creative group in the “below-the-line” section as compared to five allocated to the “above-the-line” side. However, it cannot be implied that the “below-the-line” is less important than the “above-the-line” or the people who work for the “below-the-line” is less creative than their colleague in the above the line section. It only shows that the importance and the dominance of the major media in the Hong Kong environment where big money is consumed in television, newspaper and magazine advertisement and Phoenix is no exception to the rule in its departmental allocation of resources. In fact, the “below-the-line” section in Phoenix is quite a strong section, in terms of number of staff (comprising altogether seven persons) and autonomy in handling advertising materials. The creative director in the “below-the-line” group is directly accountable to the two executive creative directors and is not subordinated to the other “above-the-line” groups.

4.6 The Daily Rhythm

The official hour of Phoenix is from nine in the morning to five-thirty in the afternoon. Beginning at nine in the morning, the receptionist of the morning shift section is already present to take care of morning papers, phone calls, appointments and, most importantly, guest reception. People of the finance department and those who are responsible for computer devices begin working at approximately the same time as what the official hour defines. Staff of the rank and file also arrives at around nine in the morning to carry on the routine work left undone the day before. The regional director of the agency arrives quite early, always before nine-thirty in the morning. But the whole agency is still very quiet in this early hours.

Usually, there is no creative staff present before ten in the morning. The support officer is often the first one of the creative department to arrive in the agency. The time of arrival is around ten but no later than ten-thirty in the morning. She once told me, "In the past, I arrived around 9:30, but it's no use to arrive that early because they (referring to the creative staff) all come back around 10:30, so I adjust my time and made a fine tune to suit them!" She had worked there for over five year, beginning in approximately the time when the two powerful executive creative

directors came to the agency. Although she is not participating in any work of a creative nature in the department, one can say that the engine of the daily creative work actually begins with this lady. This is due mainly to the fact that she is one of a few in the creative department who can schematically organize a day's work. Following and taking tight control of the scheduled time-table of the two executive creative directors, she has actually become the personal secretary to these two executive creative directors. The schedule of the two executive creative directors is often fully packed with meetings and conferences, local and overseas alike. But there is still time reserved for monitoring the implementation of the creative work if they are not traveling for overseas meeting and production. From the timetable managed by the support officer, one can easily get to know the time allocated by the executive creative directors to evaluating together with their staff about their projects in process. Normally, there is no fixed time for evaluation, but more probably the meetings would take place in the afternoon.

At around ten-thirty in the morning, most creative staff begins coming back to the office. Seldom are they be back later than eleven in the morning. At this hour, the atmosphere of the creative department is generally relaxed, always filled with chatting and laughing. But it does not include people who are rushing for project

deadlines. Those who are rushing for projects are easily noticed by the 'long face' they carry and the unusual seriousness in their attitude. They might have been continuously working for over 24 hours and stayed overnight in the office the day before. But tiredness is overwhelmed by their anxiety about the prospect of the trial 'ideas'. People handling other projects with no immediate deadlines continue their chatting and joking, but are cautious to leave those who are worried alone. Generally, the morning is a very pleasurable moment for the creative department.

The mood of relaxation might intensify near to the lunch time period when some 'illegal' activities surface. Playing game on the computers is one of the most favorable relaxing devices for the creative staff. Pushing to the extreme, they might take turn on a single computer to compete with each other or they might sit side by side in front of a computer panel to start a fighting or attacking game together. But most often they only concentrate on their own games. Another example of 'illegal' activities is riding a skate board in the office. There is no fixed time slot for this kind of exciting activity, but the morning is one of their favorite periods.

The account planning department in the morning presents the other face of the

agency. People working there is quite punctual regarding time and schedule. They all arrive at approximately 9:30 a.m. and begin work to contact with clients for appointments and meetings. The absence of some of the account planning staff is mainly because they have to visit the clients in the morning or prepare promotion events for their projects. For those who are there, telephone is the most oftenly used tool in their morning practice. Since they are the main interface for the outside to get in touch with the creative work, they talk and negotiate in the name of the agency to many parties in the daily work, including clients, the media organizations (television, radio, newspaper and magazine), outlets for placement of the advertisements (shopping malls, restaurants, bars and public areas) and the agents representing artists and celebrities. So, starting in the morning, they appear to be busier than those who work in the creative department. The work they are doing is partly interpersonal in nature and partly organizational or planning in nature.

The interpersonal side always extends right to the lunch period, the senior Account Planning staff would sometimes fully utilize the period to further facilitate the relationship with the clients. Lunches and dinners with prospective and established clients are the usual practice of nearly all the advertising agencies in

Hong Kong. The expenses spent on food, drinks and traveling are financed by the agency, but they are not unlimited. For examples, a memo note attached to the notice board states that staffs are advised to use public transport to go to the airport for welcoming overseas guests.

Comparing to the account planning people, lunches for the creative staff are more personal and there are much fewer 'business lunches', excepting the two executive creative directors. They might join several small groups (from 2 to 4-5 persons) to go on lunches, or they might form one to two big groups to join together for lunches. There are no fixed places for eating out when they go in small groups. They might go to some Hong Kong styled fast food restaurants, or go for some Japanese noodles at some small Japanese restaurants, or just some sandwiches. There are too many choices available and their choices are too diverse. But when they join into a big group, going to Chinese restaurant for 'Yum Cha' is most oftenly the choice. There are two favorite places they often go. They are the restaurant on the second floor in the complex and the restaurant near to the old center of Quarry Bay. Usually, the first choice is to be avoided because the place is too close to where they work and they might happen to meet people they know (colleagues and clients alike). To them, meeting somebody known at this most relaxing hour

cannot be regarded as a very comfortable experience. So, the first choice is often out of the initiative of the two executive creative directors to invite the whole department to have lunch together. The second choice is their preferred choice, not only the place is more distant to where they work, but closer to places where they have their hobbies.

One of those places of hobbies is of course the game center. It seems as if playing computer games at their own computer terminals is only a preparation for the more devoted activity of playing ‘Street Machine’ in the game center. In their opinion, “the feel” is totally different to play a game on the ‘Street Machine’, even though they have played and tried before on the same version released for computer. Another hobby is going to the comic book shops. There are several in the district. The staff, when finding some ‘must buy’ items, would buy them straight and keep them as their collectables. Since the world of comic is part of their reference resources, they would also like to ‘have a look’ at some of the works of the lesser known artists and authors. In that case, they would pay a rent to keep the comics for two to three days to have a fast scan of them. Nearly all the comic book shops provide this kind of convenient service. So far, we know that the creative staff also likes to make full use of the lunch hour, but, unlike the account planning staff,

it is used for reasons more private rather than interpersonal in nature.

At around two in the afternoon, the creative staff comes back from lunch. It is the time that their 'real work' begins. Meetings of all kinds are called by leaders of different levels. The most important is of course the first creative briefing by the executive creative directors. The head of the project team formed for the particular campaign should be present for these meetings. The business director and the account director might also be invited to this session, but this is not often the case. The brief explains the demand of the client and reviews in brief the works done for the client, followed by a clarification of the main direction of the particular campaign. After that, the briefing is formally ended but the creative directors and assistant creative directors would continue to stay in the big room of the two executive creative directors. They are actually beginning a brainstorming session. There is no predefined duration for the session. It all depends on whether some interesting insightful ideas can be turned into clear and workable concepts.

Brainstorming session is not rare for an advertising agency, but it is quite rare to involve the top management. Meetings below this level in the creative department

can be regarded as having some elements of 'brainstorming', meaning that lateral thinking and intuition involving emotion and feeling would be accepted in the discussion and they are no less important than logical reasoning.

One can easily notice that the atmosphere in the afternoon is quite different. The doors of the rooms of the creative directors may be closed. People are discussing, experimenting on texts or concepts, visualizing ideas or just thinking. Behaviors and expressions of all sorts can be observed in this afternoon period: a sudden bursting into laughter, a long cry, a howling shout, or sinking into complete silence and quietness. They are regarded as 'normal' behaviours in Phoenix.

Although most of the meetings are creative in their nature, the evaluation meetings can also be found at these hours in the creative department. People from the account planning section will be invited to join meetings to evaluate 'trial' ideas and draft advertisements. This would be the first real encounters of the two different ways of tackling the project. Although the communication between the creative people and the account handlers is not absent before this stage, real conflicts usually happen at this stage because ideas and concepts are now concretized in some visual form, making it more perceivable and easier to apply judgement.

The stage of evaluation also includes presentation (in visual form) to the two executive creative directors. To the creative staff, it is a more important evaluation process because they share a similar set of standard with the two executive creative directors. The standard applying to their work is not extrinsic in kinds, but more particular to the language and the aesthetics of the advertising culture. They value more about their senior's comment than anything about the clients' concern, which is represented by their account planning colleagues. Getting support from the two executive creative directors is thus a strategy often employed by the creative staff to combat the arguments of the account planning side.

To summarize, Phoenix in the afternoon is filled with meetings, gatherings and brainstorming. It is a very lively and energetic atmosphere. People in the work environment are not immobile and stuck in front of their own tables like most of commercial businesses, they are frequently moving, inside and outside of their own departments.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSING CREATIVITY IN A PROFIT-ORIENTED ORGANIZATION

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, by utilizing the case of an advertising agency, I would like to explore the possible tensions generated by the incessant tendency of capitalism to acquire more profit in an organizational context.

According to some pioneering analysts of the capitalist system like Sombart and Schumpeter, creativity and innovation serves more than that of a decorative function to energize and renew the capitalist system in face of the ever-present threat of inertia and fatigue. Acquisitive mentality, interpreted anew, now includes extending frontiers of the business and exploring new grounds for its products and services. In the context of modern business, these are the area reserved for the marketing-advertising system, alongside scientific-technological advancement. The famous sociologist, Daniel Bell, remarked in the *Afterward: 1996* to his classics, *The Cultural Contradiction of Capitalism*, “Marketing and hedonism, as I argued, became

the motor forces of capitalism.” (Bell, 1996 [1978]: 293) Advertising takes up its special role in the system, drives in a reverse ways to create new wants and desires and the new markets to sustain the momentum of the capitalism. It represents a qualitative leap in the capitalist development by expanding an area previously left with little notice or practised without very conscious effect. This is the area of ‘circulation’ and ‘consumption’. The importance of the advertising industry lies exactly in its employment of various kinds of creative strategies to accelerate the process and thus speeding the cycles of consumption.

However, as an elaborated arm of capitalism, advertising faces similar problems as those of the other capitalist organizations. The problem is classically theorized by the Marxist paradigm as that of a deadly struggle between capital and labour. It is further elaborated by Marxists like Harry Braverman as that of an opposition between management control and alienation. The contradiction manifests itself in the case of advertising as one between the need for profit and the need for creativity. This concern for profit, following the capitalist logic, might lead to restriction over freedom on the one hand and self-censorship in the practice of creativity on the other. More importantly, the way they are seeing, valuing and judging advertising works through the prism of capital might lead to issues critically

discussed by the Marxist theorists as one of dehumanization and alienation.

Although the structure and the practice of advertising are no similar to that of the factory model, it still begs the question of whether the value of human labour is valued only for its exchange value. Dehumanization, when putting to the extreme, can seriously weaken the potential for creativity, because the prerequisites of an effective creativity, that is, a human dimension emphasizing uniqueness, quality, multiplicity and freedom would then be worn out. These are the qualities that enable the creative practitioners to create and they are all the more important for an industry which claims to be the spokesman of the most creative agent in the society.

Thus, the internal tension of securing profit and creativity is already present in the internal structure of the advertising industry. The tension manifests itself in terms of 'managing creativity' in the daily practice of the advertising business. It needs on the one hand to harness the various kinds of talents inside and outside of its own field and carefully orchestrate them into some tangible messages for the purpose of profit maximization, and, on the other hand, to delimit a space large enough to protect its 'talents' from the pressure and demands of some extraneous forces.

Furthermore, the tension between profit and creativity is aggravated by the fact that the intermediary position of advertising to serve as an agent to client companies allows a high degree of 'inclusion of the client' in the daily operation of the advertising works. This allows the client to apply some direct controls over the advertising agency, starting from the budget they spend on a campaign, through the idea developing process and production details to the final release of the campaign. The clients, while they are applying controls, are also judging and evaluating the advertising service. The capitalist logic is the yardstick they use in this highly competitive market environment. They would try their very best to ensure that the expended effort approaches the full potential of labour power, first by tightening the budget and then by direct monitoring throughout the campaign to make sure that the agreed marketing targets are met.

In the case study, I would like to find out how this external control overwhelms the advertising firm's own management and creates possible tensions with those who are practicing creativity work. Then I will take up the issue of alienation to see how the practitioners of Phoenix experience an 'alienation' of a very particular kind. Last, a section would be devoted to the perspective of the practitioners to see how they strive to expand the human dimension in the daily practice of advertising.

5.2 The Ambiguous Nature of Advertising Work

Advertising work, especially creative work, is characterized by a high level of ambiguity. Formal qualifications are not a must criterion for job-holders. Almost anybody can claim to be skilled in advertising. Work results never speak for themselves. Besides, there is a lack of clear guidelines and evaluation models. The skills and products are always open to questioning. Subjective opinion, moreover, always plays an important part in judging the worth and relevance of ‘creativity’ in the advertising works. Flora, the regional director in the Agency commented on the ambiguous nature of the advertising work:

“There is always a ‘grey area’ in our work and it is very easy to be critical against our work because there are no truths.”

So, it is a tension-laden area. Flora continued on the ‘ambiguity’ of the advertising processes:

“There is much ambiguity with this business in that everybody has the right to have an opinion. And everybody has as much right as they have wrong. However, to be honest, some clients might tend to believe that they have held the upper hand over us. They might think that they possess some right over us. But they will finally realize that we are helping them to realize their plans. To be more precise, we ‘dream’ for them. But you know, the ‘dreaming’ process might be quite long and it involves a lot of people from different backgrounds. It is not easy to go through all these necessary ambiguous periods...”

What Flora had in mind of this 'dreaming' process refers both to the idea developing stage as well as the implementation stage. It normally takes at least a couple of weeks' time to a few months' time to complete an advertising campaign. Since it involves people of different talents from different backgrounds to work in a team format, conflicts are bound to arise amid a field of contrasting, if not antagonistic, opinions, viewpoints and working styles. The fact that the nature of the advertising work involves a high level of ambiguity poses a common problem to nearly all agencies of the advertising business. In the following I will undertake an analysis of the unfavourable conditions generating tension in Phoenix.

5.3 Unfavourable Conditions Generating Tension

Most of the tensions generated are centred on the area of agency-client relationship, because the clients follow the logic of ‘economizing’²¹ and see the problems mainly through the looking glass of ‘capital’. Thus, demands from the clients often overlook some practical issues of creativity and aesthetics in the practice of advertising. On the other hand, the advertising practitioners, though they realize that client’s demands are always of paramount importance, have to assert their own right as professionals to provide an advertising solution for their clients. Thus, the service of advertising involves a great deal of persuasion, bargaining as well as cooperation. The inclusion of the representatives from the client side serves in one way to reinstate the presence of the client interests in the advertising process and in another way serves as a platform facilitating communication. In the case of Phoenix, we observe a high level of inclusion of client. An account manager, Felix, commented:

“We work in a team working format. However, the ‘real’ team includes not only our company colleagues, but also the clients. I don’t know whether it is because of the IMC (Integrated Marketing Communication) tradition (which emphasizes a close partnership between the advertising agency and client, with the

²¹ Bell uses this term to refer to the central logic of the post-industrial societies. In his words, “the economizing mode – the exact calculation of monetary costs and returns – has been an efficient organizer of production but has had two large social costs: treating peoples as things within the sphere of production, and using the environment as a free good, and therefore recklessly.” (Bell, 1996 [1978]: 269)

account servicing taking a strategic leading role). But I think it is a quite widely shared belief or even common knowledge in advertising that the client should be included in the advertising process. But this inclusion sometimes means that the client has the ultimate say in our internal production process. This naturally leads to some unpredictable outcomes and conflicts.”

As shown, the high inclusion of client is a device which works in the interest of the client. We can note that the integrity of the advertising professionals is more or less weakened. The mutually dependent relationship also gives rise to the possibility of client-agency conflicts.

The high inclusion of the client in the daily operation and the prominent position the client holds in the advertising process put the client in a position on a par with the creative practitioners. The proximity of their relationship turns client demands into demands of immediacy that may sideline aesthetic and practical consideration. The representation of the interests of capital may be so crude and blunt that the creative practitioners may perceive a kind of infringement of their professional knowledge. In addition, the exertion of control by the clients through tight-monitoring in various stages of the advertising campaign further aggravates the relationship.

Normally, it is the account servicing guys who come to help to resolve and take heat

off the tensions arising from the client-agency relationship. Account servicing in any advertising agency is supposed to serve a 'broker' function in an advertising environment. The interface that it provides aims at managing the client relationship in a more systematic manner; significant efforts are also taken to reduce possible tensions between the client and the advertising agency.

However, in the environment of Phoenix, we notice that account servicing falls short of its goal of easing the tension-laden areas. The role of a mediator as mentioned above is always downplayed in the Phoenix scenario and the function as expected of an account servicing to ease the tension between the client and the agency is also always 'skipped' over. It is another condition conducive to the building up of tension in Phoenix.

Mary, the newcomer account executive, felt frustrated when the importance of her work appeared to be eroded:

"Although I'm new to the business, I'm quite conscious about my role as an account executive as well as my job specifications. However, I often have the feeling that someone takes over my work. This is especially the case in the production stage. I know that they are worrying about how their money is being spent and the final outlook of the advertisements, but it is my work to deal with the production people. I know that they are not intended to be impolite but

sometimes I just feel I'm left with only trivial things: contacting, scheduling, documenting and reporting."

The role of Mary as an account executive to help coordinate the implementation work is weakened, if not neglected, in the process and her responsibility is somehow trivialized.

The creative driven environment is also another reason for the weak account servicing role in the scenario of Phoenix. Jane, an account manager, commented on this point by comparing it to other non creative-driven context:

"You have to be real conscious about your working in Phoenix. It is a creative driven one. You won't get that kind of power like those (other agencies) driven by the account arm – they are often much bigger agencies and they are often dealing with some international giant accounts. Nearly every campaign in those kinds of companies has cases and handbook to refer to. You can say that the whole process is quite prescriptive in nature. Client like P&G will not allow you to do your own way. Every tiny thing like the typography used in the copy, the distance between the logo and the visual, all have something to refer to. You must follow the manual and refine it in the local context. So, the account planning there is very important. This gives the account manager there prominent power. It's totally not the case here..."

The reason for the dominant position of the creative and the concomitant subsidiary role of the account servicing is mainly due to the influence and power of the creative leaders. The most important function of the account arm – getting

clients - is taken over by the creative leaders in the case of Phoenix. What Jane mentioned about the works and responsibilities of the account servicing is somehow not there in Phoenix. Andrew, another account manager, talked about his deprivation of power:

“The largest client here is brought by Bosco and Mark. They (the account manager of the client and the creative leaders) are close friends and have known each other for ten years. So, it’s natural they sometimes skip me over on some occasions. Yes, I would feel downplayed...hurt (laughing). But I don’t really mind. If I feel real angry, I will go straight to them.”

The subsidiary role of the account servicing arm is obvious. Everybody in Phoenix, even a newcomer, knows that the primary role of the account servicing people here is ‘persuasive’ in nature rather than ‘directing’. Sometimes, job responsibilities are taken by the clients themselves and the account servicing people are left with only trivial tasks. In addition, the most important function of account servicing has been taken over by the creative leaders. This factor of the subsidiary role of the account servicing, accompanying the ambiguous nature of the advertising business and the high level of inclusion of clients in the advertising practice, has created a condition in which is expressed the tension between capital and creativity.

5.4 The Tension between Capital and Creativity

In the case of Phoenix, the tension between the client and the agency is basically manifested along two fronts. The first of course concerns the account servicing people. Although the account servicing is relatively weak in Phoenix, the pressure is no less heavy for them. Jane, the account manager, gave us a general portrait of the pressures she felt about client's demands:

"Client's demands are of all kinds and they come from all angles. They are not bad people, but they just watch over every tiny aspect during the process. I think they sometimes view themselves as partial or 'part-time' employees in the Agency. However, what I think is the most demanding thing is that they want us to be their employees too...Sometimes, clients drop in with no prior notice. It might be the proximity (few blocks away from the location of the Agency), I think! That's fine. But I would find quite annoying sometimes, especially when they call upon us for only trivial things."

To Jane, the demands from clients include 'tightening budget' (monitoring budget), watching over the creative process: especially the idea developing stage and the production implementation stage, information updating as well as 'emotional comforting' (i.e. helping them to relax by assuring them that deadlines would be met or target would be fulfilled). Life at Phoenix can be quite stressful, especially when approaching project deadline, Jane continued:

“Everything is rushing. And I have to repeat to myself as well as to the clients that the idea is great and the production is fantastic, even though I personally don’t think the idea is really great. Since we are in the middle position, I sometimes do have the feeling I was squeezed by the two sides. This is the case when the clients demand some minor changes from the creative. All of them are pulling long faces at us. I can afford heavy workload but the emotional stress is really hell.”

It is significant to note that the practitioners in Phoenix do not speak of how everything is wonderful in the agency, because everyone realizes that there is no rosy picture in the advertising business. In fact, nearly everyone has explained unhappy incidents. Mary, the new comer in the agency as well as in the business, relates how when things get rushed and stressful, people can be “at each other’s throats”. Similarly, Felix, the account director remembers episodes when several others attempted to “act tough” and took on personalities that were not their own. In his description, the atmosphere would be like “everybody gets on everybody’s nerves”.

The feeling of being ‘squeezed’ and the embarrassing position of a ‘powerless mediator’ describe in general the experience of the account people in Phoenix. Flora, the Regional director, so explained the tension, “The focus of any ad agency is on the tasks to be performed; it is not so much what the client wants but how to accomplish their wants. So the interaction between the agency and the client would be more complex and tension-laden if it involves a crucial exchange of

specialized information.” The explanation given by Flora, though falling short of its goal to explain the situation of the account servicing people, points out the issue at stakes for the conflict between the client and the creative people. While we can conclude for the account people that the feeling of being sidelined and the pressures they are facing originated from their subsidiary role and relatively powerless position in Phoenix, the direct conflict between the client and the creative people is of a different nature. It is a ‘war’ between capital and creativity and it is a manifestation of the opposition between two different mind-sets.

5.4.1 Tensions in the area of creative works

Tension is especially manifested in creative practice. Creativity is exactly what the regional director referred to as the most tension-laden area because it involves a great deal of specialized knowledge of aesthetics, design and sensitivity. This kind of specialized knowledge is an asset of the creative practitioners, but it is a requirement for being a ‘capable’ client because the good monitoring of any given campaign requires that the clients have a certain level of know-how in order to give commands, to communicate with the creative practitioners, and to accept the advice of the creative. In other words, the client is expected to possess some necessary knowledge on production-related skills in order to work with the creative people.

A portrait of an 'ideal client' was given out by Bosco, the executive creative director:

"Clients can be made more productive partner when there is a match between the required production-related skills, sensitivity about art and beautiful things and a respectful attitude towards our advertising people, and the degree of involvement generally required of the client in production process."

But the reality does not quite square with this ideal picture. The general response from the creative practitioners suggests that most of the client representatives are not proficient enough in making aesthetic as well as professional judgements on the production of advertisements. The lack of formal training and inexperience in the specialized knowledge might be the reason. Vicky, a 26 year old art director, commented on the general quality of clients:

"Some of them are really smart. They are very familiar with the advertising practice. They know every detail and possess very solid knowledge on every procedure involved in the practice. The most invaluable thing is that they know our difficulties. So they can come to action at some very good and appropriate timing. But they are people not exceeding more than 20% in the total whole. The rest are lousy people. It might be due to their inexperience or young in age. There can be all sorts of reasons. But the most unbearable situation is that they bluff about something they really don't know. That is our main difficulty, because, after all, they are clients."

The quality of the client, if it is towards the lower end of the spectrum, can lead to tension involving a great deal of resentment as well as criticism. Charles, a creative

director who had followed Bosco and Mark for about 10 year's time, voiced out his criticism on some clients who showed no respect to some experts:

"I myself have great respect for some very good photographers and directors because I really admire them. This is a personal reason. Technically speaking, they are real good. They can give you what you can think of or even something you have never thought about before. They are really experts. But sometimes I really don't know how they (the clients) think. Why can't they just show some respect for some really good men in the field? They really don't know anything."

It is apparent Charles harboured resentment against those who do not give him due respect, but this is more an example of the assertion of a belief that creativity is not an area which anyone can do. It is a specialized area that requires years of training as well as talent. The creative practitioners consciously or unconsciously know that they can only counter the clients with their professional knowledge. It is the only and the last resort they can use to assert their power.

In the face of this kind of challenge, whether it is subtle or explicit in tone, the clients would reassert their power. The device they usually use in reasserting their position is to apply 'banning'. The clients practically possess full power in banning any idea suggested by the creative people. Vicky, when asked about the issue of banning ideas, made these remarks:

“They can ban anything! From where we begin at the idea ‘brain storming’ stage right through to the execution stage, they can ‘kick out’ anything they don’t want. I would say some of the choices they made might not be well-founded. Most of their banning has got nothing to do with the budget or money. I can reasonably accept it if we are banned for deviating from what we have agreed on the creative brief or for violating their image in the public eyes ... that kind of matters. However, the banning can be from all sides and go into the very details in our specialty. I don’t know! It might be a kind of habit, or they just want to make sure to everybody else that they are ‘there’. ”

Vicky’s comment tells a lot about ‘banning’ as a usual device the clients use to reinstate their presence and to show their power. Client, as the spokesman of the logic of capital, can legitimately apply its power over budget and expenses. But what we observe from the case is that they would also apply power over areas which are obviously other’s specialty. The only explanation for this high interfering is that they assume they have full power on everything. Mark the executive creative director explained why this is so:

“Theoretically, they have full power. They can change something that we both sides have agreed upon; it would lead to bad feeling on the both sides. When you feel bad and when you feel not fine and smooth, somehow it would lead them to discontinue the contract of the next year. Yes, the problem might be theirs. But it’s always the client side that holds the upper hand for the contract matter. They are the resources. Conventionally we have to ‘pitch’ them.”

The power of client is apparent in a number of different ways. The control

exerted by the client begins right from the very beginning of procuring new businesses. The average relationship between Phoenix and its clients is two and a half year. But the relationships with the key persons in prospective clients span over a period from three to over ten years. The acquaintances allow the executive creative directors in Phoenix to persuade the would-be clients through formal 'constructive solicitation' and informal gatherings or 'talks' which "sell" the agency as skilled and competent enough to "handle whatever they asked for us". But it also reveals that it is the client who is in control of which agency does what and for how long.

Despite the high reputation of their creative works in the field of advertising, the creative of Phoenix are still overwhelmed by the clients in ways we had mentioned above. However, the creative people would not feel ashamed or hurt if they had worked in the field long enough to grasp the idea that 'it's a daily stuff' and 'it's a usual practice' for their idea being banned. Vicky again said, *"They want to show that they are in control of the campaign. They are the final decision maker. We are well trained. We know their 'psychology'."* Tim, a 27 year old copywriter, described the experience of banning ideas as a normal and usual experience in the advertising practice:

“It doesn’t take long for you to realize that banning ideas is a very normal practice. We are all psychologically prepared for the clients to ban our ideas. Seven out of ten ideas would go straight to the trashcans before they make their appearance for the clients. One would go to the archive in my brain. The client is responsible only for murdering one of the very similar twins.”

In the face of the overwhelming power of the client, the only tactics the creative workers can turn to is to be ‘psychologically prepared’ for the banning. They are very conscious of their situation and they are well aware of the client’s psychology of wanting to be the decision maker. So, there are a lot of little tricks the creative use to secure their ‘aesthetic autonomy’ in spite of their lacking of the power to make decisions. For examples, the ‘dummies’ they are making for presentation might follow basically a generic style, restricting or diverting the client to choose from some “similar twins”. Or they would prepare a set of variations of ideas on the same theme, leading the clients to go the way they would like them to go.

We can here temporarily conclude that the tension between the creative workers and the client is rather tense and the balance of power is of course tilted towards the client side. The only source of power the creative workers can refer to is their expertise on a specialized set of aesthetic and design knowledge in the tournament against the client. However, the desire of the creative to assert a space of its own is always counteracted by the overwhelming power of the client in applying

'banning'. In face of this 'powerless' situation, there are still available some little strategies or tricks the creative can use to 'reassert' their ideas, but the final power is still firmly rested on the client's hands. Thus, we can say that the creative cannot quite defend its position solely on its own; the rescue must come from somewhere else. In the next section, I will explore in details of the functions of leaders in Phoenix to see if they can remedy the situation by creating a buffer against the logic of capital.

5.5 The Persuasion Work of the Leaders

As mentioned in the previous section, the pressure on the creative practitioners is rather high, taking into consideration the overwhelming power of the client. The space of creativity is highly unlikely to be regarded as autonomous. It is a field of conflicts. In Phoenix, it seems the rescue can come only from the creative leaders. However, we have an unexpected negative answer. When probed by the question of how he would protect his fellow workers against client's demands, Mark said:

"We won't defend for them, they should defend for themselves. All we can do is to persuade the clients to try something new, but the final decision is theirs."

Mark's tactics is one of non-intervention. When conflicts really arise, he would stand back and let his fellow creative defend for themselves. He made it clear in the following comment about the role a leader should adopt regarding the client-agency relationship:

"Advertising is at the same time a persuasion science. We have to persuade the public to listen to us in our creative work. We also have to persuade the client. The persuasion begins right before we become their representative [their agency] and the process can be very long too. The important clients we are holding now are friends of many years. Some might be over ten. We know each other and they are familiar with our style too. They like our style and believe that our style can really lead to something different. The playfulness, peculiar images and words, extraordinary things are all already accepted or tolerated right before we

close the business deal. In other words, our creativity is already accepted and it is also needed by our clients. I think persuasion should be targeted at a right and wise direction. Intervention is unwise if the conflicts are already there. After all, a favourable environment is already there and we are continuously trying our best to expand it.”

Good relationship with clients starts with good persuasion. That is the answer given by Mark regarding the question of solving conflicts. We can notice from Mark’s answer that there is a lot of buffering work ongoing and all refers to the final goal to maintain as well as to expand the space of creativity. And the strategy the leaders adopt is one of prevention rather than remedy. To them, it is already too late to protect the space of creativity if your creativity is not accepted beforehand. So, they regard persuasion as one of the most important task they have to attend to. In addition, it is very important for both the agency and the client to go in the same direction. Mark further explained on what he meant by persuasion:

“Persuasion is not begging. We are providing some professional service that the client cannot provide to themselves. Besides providing good ideas, we have to work together with the client to make the marketing aim as clear as possible. I believe that the first principle is simplicity. The aim should be simple and clear. We have to be very conscious about whether it [the campaign] is to make ‘noise’, to remind to the public it is the best, or redress a company’s image. There is theoretically infinite ways to achieve the above aims but they can only choose one aim. Good consequences besides the prescribed aim can only be regarded as bonus. Helping clients to clarify what they really want is part of the persuasion process. And I believe it can help to keep misunderstanding to a minimum level.”

We can now clearly grasp the meaning behind the professional jargon of ‘persuasion’. We know that the role of the leaders in the constant activities of persuasion includes also the task of achieving understanding and it helps to ease the tension in the client-agency relationship. To Mark, prevention is much more important than any kind of cure. The non-intervention strategy they adopt when conflicts arise is more understandable now. Bosco, the other executive creative director, even regard conflicts as part of the learning process:

“I can recall many incidents when some of our colleagues became very upset at not being accepted by the clients. But it’s natural and it’s a kind of learning too. It’s a reality in the advertising business. But we have done our part.”

The leaders are very conscious of their belief in individuality and the potential for an individual to take his or her responsibility in an advertising environment. They also believe that the cultivation of a good advertising professional can only be achieved through learning. Learning here includes learning by mistakes.

To sum up, the devices used by the creative leaders are ‘preventive’ in nature. The leaders believe that a good buffer starts from a persuasion service and this service includes a clarification process that might help to promote the mutual

understanding with clients. They believe at the same time that conflicts can be kept to a minimum if marketing strategy is clear and simple. If conflicts really arise, they also believe their fellow colleagues can learn from them. We can here assert that there is already some buffer work done by the leaders, but they are more subtle and not so visible in the daily operation of advertising practice. It appears that this buffer serves a very limited function in mediating the relationship between the client and the agency, achieving only some 'cushioning' effects when conflicts arise. In fact, the work of the leaders in Phoenix aims at creating a more flexible 'buffer' through cultivating in the minds of the practitioners a more tolerant attitude regarding creative practice: expanding the capacity to incorporate conflicts.

5.6 Alienation in a New Dress

The problem of alienation in Phoenix appears with no similarity to that of the factory model as portrayed by the neo-Marxist Harry Braverman (Braverman, 1998 [1974]).²² The profession and the nature of the advertising work demands the practitioners to consciously apply and actively involve in the labour process of the advertising campaign. Although the execution process is always outsourced to some famous studios and directors, the practitioners in Phoenix follow through to the tiny details in the production process. There is also enough room for the practitioners to improvise and experiment with new ideas and techniques despite a carefully calculated planning of any given campaign. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the practitioners would totally surrender their aesthetic interests in the labour process of the advertising practice. Hence, it seems as if the Braverman's argument of 'deskilling'²³ is questionable when applied to the context of Phoenix.

The main argument of Braverman primarily rests upon the concept of 'integrity of

²² Based on the model of the factory, the capitalist logic is now acquiring an objectified form and expresses itself in a carefully scientifically managed process known as Taylorism – summarized by Braverman in the form of three distinct principles, “dissociation of the labour process from the skills of the workers”, “separation of conception from execution”, and the “use of this monopoly over knowledge to control each step of the labour process and its mode of execution” (Braverman, 1998).

²³ The most important argument of Braverman is that the application of modern management techniques, accompanying with them the automation, erodes the power of the workers regarding the integrity of work when they contribute their labor in the production process.

work' which in turn rests upon the 'craftsmanship' tradition of art. He then elaborated into a criticism of the modern factory work and postulated an alienation thesis when meaning and satisfaction cannot be acquired from the decomposed process of labour. It is very dubious whether the Braverman argument can be directly applied to Phoenix because nearly nobody in the advertising agency admits himself or herself as artist and they even consciously adopt a position in denying they are artists.

5.6.1 Denying oneself as artist

The work of creative practice is to combine the use of a visual style, music, copy and celebrity (someone or something that possess 'star' quality), to dress up an advertising idea which must fulfil the need of a given advertising campaign. It is commonly believed that it should be half a pace ahead of society, and that it should make people want to catch up with what they perceive to be going on, but not to the extent that nobody understands it. The practitioners in Phoenix were aware in a very conscious way that what they are doing belong to the modern market-advertising system – a highly specialized set of work that involves a high degree of division of labour. Nearly nobody in the case claims that their works are works of art or possess quality of originality comparing to that of art. What

they are concerned about is the impact an advertising campaign can produce on people. Dave, the creative director, talked about the importance of impact:

“What we concern about, in our field, is impact. The point is to affect the mind of the people [consumers], in various kinds of ways, so that they would perceive the message we try to convey in advertisements.”

There is implicitly a simple communication model of sender, message and receiver behind Dave’s comment. We can clearly notice that Dave’s emphasis is on the side of the receiver. The importance of ‘message’ is somehow neglected or ‘skipped’ over. However, it doesn’t imply that they have no concern about the message part, wherein the creative workers devote their aesthetic and design contributions. In a sense, the aesthetic concern in the advertising practice is utilized for some extrinsic purposes. The public is one of these extrinsic references. Susan, a copywriter, when asked whether she would consider what she is doing as art, gave us an answer that further illustrates the constraints of the advertising practice:

“Of course it involves some kinds of artistic elements, but I’m not the Artist in your sense. I’m not on my own. I’m not totally free. I have to follow the brief [the creative brief]. There are many possibilities in copywriting, that’s for sure, but not without constraints. It’s not like writing and I’m not a writer who can write in his own way about his own story. After all, I’m just selling an idea which the public can understand.”

Aesthetic freedom is contained within the limits of marketing concerns, which in turn are camouflaged in the jargon of ‘impact’ on the public. People are educated and trained to be conscious of their positions in an advertising-marketing system. They are always reminded that the attitude required of being a creative is totally different from that of a fine artist. In the following comment of Flora, the regional director, we can clearly observe that the ideological power of the system:

“I would say it’s kind of ‘romanticizing’ about us. And I believe this ‘romanticizing’ applies also to the public. But not to those who are actually working right now in the industry. I would say the need of the creative people is quite simple. They want the client to be clear about what they want, so that they can concentrate on the right path right from the idea developing stage. They want the Account Servicing to manage client relationship in such a way that the chances of their best work appearing are enhanced. The best creative people do not need much time to realize that they are participating in a culture of marketing, helping clients to solve their marketing problem.”

The function of the creative worker is somehow reduced to a simple purpose: “helping clients to solve their marketing problem”. At the same time, they would be constantly reminded that they are participating in a marketing system where no ‘romanticizing’ is needed. What Flora means by ‘romanticizing’ refers to a misleading generalization of the image of the creative people as some kinds of ‘budding artist’, wishing to demonstrate their artistic abilities through their knowledge of art. The misleading belief generally assumes that, if the creative

practitioners could make a living from art, they would have done so, and that they resent the limitations imposed by commercial concerns. This portrait of the creative people as a fine artist is far too an inaccurate picture of the advertising reality. Dave, 30 years old, just promoted to be creative director, claimed that he knew the difference between a creative and an artist right from his university years:

"I remembered that even before my graduation from college, I had a very clear idea of what I was supposed to do in an agency. That's why I picked up Design in my university years. Now I'm more sure about it. Of course, I learnt a lot in the past few years and there were so many things that you can't get from school. But right from the very beginning, I never thought of myself as an artist. Although somebody might feel that way, it won't take long for them to realize that here's not the place for artists. Three months! Maximum! They would disappear, not only in this agency, but in the whole field."

We can infer from the above evidences that the constraints for aesthetic freedom is not absent from the advertising environment. But what is most interesting is that the constraints are well internalized in the minds of the creative practitioners and the application of control is somehow self-driven rather than externally imposed. It is a 'self-estrangement' of a very different kind and the 'alienation' works exactly in an identification process. The very way the creative practitioners assert their being different from the fine artist tells also that they are accepting the limits imposed on the space of creativity by commercial concerns. Moreover, the

question of aesthetic concerns is somehow 'skipped' over or camouflaged as a question of a marketing concern. They are reassuring themselves that they are a species of a different kind and they are working on a creativity different from those of the fine artists. They make themselves content to work for 'creativity' within limits. Although the creative practitioners are provided with enough room for their experimentation with ideas, it does not imply that advertising work as a whole is as spontaneous as in the 'brainstorming' sessions. Rather, the spontaneity is always monitored, or self-censored, at different stages and by different people.

5.6.2 Pressures for being 'new'

However, we can observe that there are pressures that arising from a very peculiar source, that is, the very anxious mentality to assert oneself as 'creative' by demonstrating one's willingness to try and experiment on new ideas and methods. Dissatisfactions are observed when the practitioners notice that their 'creativity' is in decline, no matter whether this be manifested in terms of periodical difficulties in developing new ideas or sluggish development in their careers. In Phoenix, these dissatisfactions are much more pronounced than those feelings of 'meaninglessness' in the work process. The concept of 'alienation' as viewed from the Marxist perspective thus needs to be re-evaluated.

We start from an example of one of the intangible pressures felt by most of creative practitioners. It is manifested as a symptom of a periodic depression.

Tim the copywriter said:

“What is most frustrating is not that the idea is banned by your seniors or the clients, but the moment you found that your mind doesn’t turn...It’s really terrifying! It seems as if your mind just stops responding...to anything. I told myself – I want something new, but the mind just won’t work.”

Similar negative feelings about developing something new for each project are observed among practitioners of different age and expertise. Charles, the creative director also commented:

“I don’t know if it is a periodical symptom. But it just occurs at some given times. It has nothing to do with age, I swear. It just comes and goes without a trace and returns at some unexpected time again and again. It is really a disastrous and humiliating experience because you just can’t think of something new and your mind seems to be stuck with the old pattern, the old visualization and the old experience. It just doesn’t turn and is incapable of even making some tiny variations over the old ones. There is no cure for it. If you are experienced enough to sense about it, you would ask for a break.”

The momentum of creativity, if felt to be in decline, triggers a series of resentments against oneself. This includes self-pity, incapability and helplessness as shown in

the above two examples. Advertising firm is not the work-place where it is easy to prove one's value, competence and contributions to the advertising culture. The drive for newness is one of the most announced intangible pressures experienced by the advertising practitioners. It is less likened to the phenomenon of 'alienation' described in Braverman's terms but relates more intimately to what Daniel Bell described as a mentality aiming at the 'incessant quest for boundlessness' and expressing in a 'heroic adventure for something new'. This incessant quest adds to the creativity needed for the advertising environment a sense of hurry. Put it another way, it can be interpreted that creativity, when infiltrated by a logic of craving newness, alienates itself into a kind of 'capital' that the creative practitioners feel incapable to dispense with and which they feel compelled to sustain in order to feel secure.

Creativity in the advertising environment can easily turn itself into a symbolic capital and submission to the logic of the capital can be further illustrated by the fact that it becomes a bet as well as the issue at stakes in the career trajectory of the creative practitioners. The role creativity plays in the vanity fair of prestige and recognition can be demonstrated by the attitude adopted by the creative practitioners towards competition prizes in the field of advertising profession.

This attitude, at the same time, is traceable to the theme of the ‘incessant quest for newness’. Charles reveals in an explicit way:

“One must show his talents, not to the clients, but to the advertising field. You know that we have some awards which are very important in the field, like the 4A Award. They are the bargaining power for your promotion as well as your mobility. But showing off talents cannot be ‘one-shot’. We are a small circle and your lucky hit will soon be discovered as only a mere lucky hit. So, one must keep on making up something new, something really brilliant if one chooses advertising as his profession.”

We can very accurately grasp from what Charles told us that the relationship between the importance of the competition prizes and the all-the-same importance of the ‘quest for newness’ is connected to each other in a circular way. Creativity, here, is reified in its two forms: the symbolic prizes and the drive for being new. It is a ‘currency’ which brings fame, promotion and power to the creative practitioners. But it at the same time is set against the workers in the form of an externalized logic which is the source of pressure and frustration felt by the workers in the vanity fair of ‘fashion’.

We can sum up by saying that in the environment of the advertising business, ‘alienation’ manifests itself in a form with less similarity to the Braverman model. Rather, it expresses itself as a tension subjectively felt by the creative practitioners to

crave for the new. Although it is more subtle in its outlook, it has no less influence on the creative workers. It works on the one hand on the mentality of the practitioners in the process of the internalization of the market constraints and on the other hand ‘reifies’ creativity into an external force aligned with the capitalist logic of infinite acquisition. They work together to limit the ‘human dimension’ which Marx claimed to be the primordial source and essence of creativity. In the last section of this chapter, we will go directly to the issues related to this dimension and see how it happens in Phoenix.

5.7 The Quest for a Human Dimension

In spite of the particular kind of alienation experienced by the advertising practitioners, there are lots of evidences which have been shown to protect, maintain and expand the conditions characterizing a 'human dimension'. The qualities of uniqueness, human-orientedness and freedom are always shown up in the interviews with practitioners as the most 'valuable' or 'admirable' values in Phoenix. We are not here trying to prove that the agency has already achieved a very high level stage regarding the 'humane' side of work, but only to show that those are the qualities that might help facilitate creativity.

The creative leaders, apart from being an explicit advocate for freedom, work in a very human-oriented way with their fellow creative colleagues. Mark talked about his philosophy with people:

"People come to this agency out of no accident. They usually possess quite a strong belief about their own abilities or talents. That's why we can't really inject or implant something into their minds. What we are doing is actually stimulation, but stimulation cannot be pushed or forced. We have to consider each individual in a very particular way and the prescription is very tailor-made. And we always know that the prescription might fail and it is also not their faults. So we have to observe and wait and relate and communicate more deeply with our fellow colleagues."

What we find in Mark's comment is a very conscious attitude that the leaders in Phoenix adopt in relating to their fellow creatives. It is humanistic in tone and it reveals his belief in the cultivation of people. It is very closely knitted into their idea of a good advertising firm wherein no people is being 'forced' to do his or her work. Ideas and creativity cannot be forced and indoctrination is not an appropriate tool in the business of creativity. Rather, a humanistic attitude and a humanistic environment are more essential for the growth of creativity. Charles the creative director also talked in his own terms about the importance of being humanistic:

"We all have temper. The clients, the account servicing and the people here (creative department), nobody is an exception. That proves something...that we are not machines. So, you cannot ask people to do things a machines can do. Can I elaborate on it? Client who demands a completed work overnight is a bad client because only a machine can do it. Client who demands a work that completely looks the same as we have done for her before is a bad client too because I can re-make it with a simple click (on the computer). But we have no complaints for it (Laughs!). It also applies to the people who work here. If you find that you are repeating yourself, you are not a good creative because you are acting as a machine. And, if you find that people in the account servicing obeying without any consideration, then they are not good account people because they are acting as answering machines. (Laughs!) I know that advertising work is hard work but I always remind myself there is something we as human should not do."

Advertising work, to Charles, is something a machine cannot do. The reference to

the computer as an anti-human analogy tells us that works in an advertising environment is not mechanical and automated. It involves people from different backgrounds who do have temper as well as emotion. Emotion sometimes even functions to facilitate the creativity needed for advertising work. Flora the regional director pointed this out in the following interview:

“Advertising people are normally very outgoing and they are emotionally loaded. Because feelings and things like that are the bases of creativity, so to speak, they are often very rich in ideas and associations. They can quickly associate with various phenomena. Advertising people are seldom very systematic or structured. They are free and bounded by nothing and they are bounded by the clients neither. They are only working with the clients to carry out objectives agreed upon with the clients. But they are sometimes ‘slaves’ to their feelings and emotions, which they would deny if you go directly to them. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the forces are working underneath and endow them with the power to create and try new things. Of course sometimes the result might appear dissatisfactory. But we experience no disastrous results or consequences in our records...”

Feelings and emotion are the forces behind good advertising work. Creative practice involves and demands a great deal of sensitivity, imagination and associative talents from the creative workers. All these qualities cannot be calculated or automated and they belong to a dimension very particular to our human race. What Flora mentioned does not imply that the human dimension is synonymous with the space of creativity, but they are overlapping and are closely associated to each other. We can assert here that the human dimension is the background or

prerequisite for the growth of creativity. In the following account of Jane, we can notice that the human dimension is also the concern of the account servicing people:

“It all depends on whether there is ‘chemistry’. If we (the account people and the client) have, the project can be smooth, efficient and interesting. Sometimes there’s a lot of fun to work with the right kind of people. There might still be conflicts, but they can be perceived as a kind of necessary ‘family matter’ which would not lead to ‘divorce’ of any kind.”

This analogy to some kind of ‘marriage’ relationship illustrates quite a lot about the nature of a good client-agency relationship. Softness, warmth, person-oriented, quality, subjectivity and relation-orientedness are the qualities implied in the above comments. To the account servicing people, advertising means not only a task interactive job, but a job involving much human-oriented work. They in general believe that advertising work is work about people rather than procedural duty.

To sum up, the human dimension is an indispensable platform for the growth of creativity. The belief of the leaders that individuals are endowed with unique quality, independent judgement and free will are all qualities fostering a kind of humanistic attitude in the environment of Phoenix. This attitude and its manifestation as an atmosphere helps a lot in easing tension on the one hand and to

induce creativity on the other. It is also under this condition that the feeling and emotion of the creative practitioners are highly valued and recognized to be the 'forces behind' that help to produce good advertising work. In addition, it serves also to 'soften' the tension that comes with the encroachment of the client's power and helps the account servicing people in looking at the conflicts in a more positive way. All in all, happy environment and the sense of freedom, tinted by humour and fun, in this case, serve to protect a 'space' large enough for creativity to function.

CHAPTER SIX

ORGANIZING CREATIVITY IN A BUREAUCRACY

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I like to explore issues relating to the concept of 'bureaucracy' and to see how this concept applies in the case of an advertising agency and generates possible tension with the impulse to pursue creativity in an organizational context at the same time.

The notion 'bureaucracy' employed here is basically in the Weberian tradition. It is first of all used here as a technical tool to help us explore how an organization is hierarchically organized and how far the behaviour of its people is rule-abiding. But more importantly, as Weber demonstrated, it is a microscopic prism through which the general process of rationalization is expressed in an organizational context. To Weber, rationalization is the process by which the individuals in the capitalist era implant in their mentality an abstract-oriented rule-abiding behaviour. It might, as Weber predicted, lead to 'routinization' in which such rule-abiding tendency finally prevents any possibility to change and innovate and disregards any

substantive goal behind actions pursued. This tension between 'routinization' and creativity is most relevant to us because creativity is what an advertising company claims to be its most important asset to earn its clients on the one hand and define its profession on the other. So, whether it is at stake in the face of increasing 'bureaucratic' tendency would be the central issue we would like to explore in this chapter.

Advertising mainly follows the general societal trend to 'bureaucratize' the organization in its expansion into multi-national enterprises in the 70's and 80's in order to manage more efficiently and effectively. The 'bureaucratic' traits like a hierarchically organized organizational structure with well defined work tasks, specialization of functions based upon expert knowledge and order and command based on the legal offices are all there in an advertising agency. It is supposed to organize the manpower in the organization in its most efficient manner to fulfil the capitalistic aim of procuring more economic interests. However, these features are so common that they are often neglected or taken for granted. The function of bureaucracy to guarantee the stability needed for sustaining the day-to-day operation of an organization is often overlooked. The rule and disciplines are also important because they serve to balance off the 'fuzziness' of the core creativity work.

It is always the concern of the management people in an advertising agency to make sure that a sense of discipline is observed in the behaviours as well as mentality in their fellow colleagues. The main worry for them is not that people are lazy or unproductive but whether a sense of company can be maintained within a rather loose and free environment. They believe that a minimum of rules and regulations must be maintained to protect its practitioners from going astray in their spontaneous behaviours.

The tradition of advertising (the original 'broker' legacy on the one hand and the art-based studio working format on the other), however, has already built-in an organizational format known as 'team working' that serves to counteract the bureaucratic structure. I would like to explore how this widely discussed working format expresses itself in the context of advertising and to what extent it helps remedy the rigidity of bureaucracy. Some scholars, especially Michael Burawoy (1979), argued that team working is only a new kind of control that serves to reinforce rather than weaken the power of bureaucracy. Although we can observe in the case that intense peer relationship in the working environment might lead to stressful experiences, the answer to the debate lies rather in the nature of values as

advocated by the management. This leads us to the investigation of the ‘culture’ or the ‘philosophy’ as propounded by the leaders in the advertising agency. We would like to see how does it generate a sense of ‘one company’ (group sense) on the one hand and how it prevents its colleague from falling into the trap of conformity to control on the other. It is exactly at this point that the nature of the leadership seems so important.

Weber’s concept of ‘charisma’ is used here to help to analyze the creative philosophy of the leaders in Phoenix. We would like to see how the disruptive and the integrative function of ‘charisma’ can help at the same time to defy the rigidity of the bureaucracy and to provide guidance to the creative practice in the advertising environment.

The chapter will be divided into three parts. First, I would like to see how the case selected demonstrates the ‘bureaucratic’ traits in its organization. Then I will explore the team work format in Phoenix to see how it overcomes some of the difficulties of ‘bureaucracy’ and how it submits to the ‘routinization’ logic in the process. Finally, a special attention would be given to the issue of ‘charismatic leadership’ to find out how it functions to off-set the rigidity of the bureaucracy and

to introduce elements of flexibility into the system.

6.2 The Bureaucratic Traits

Phoenix is structurally divided between the creative and business functions, the former personnel generating and producing advertising schemes, the latter personnel, in various ways, conducting the administrative and financial affairs of organization.

In its day-to-day operation the agency appears as a formal rational organization. Professionalism is expressed in business dress (for the managements and the account executives) or well-dressed casual wear (for the creative professionals) company behaviours. Members must work from nine to five, with one hour for lunch. The professionals, particularly the creative people, regularly work longer hours.

In addition, the agency hierarchically organizes approximately 45 non-professionals and assistant professionals (service personnel, clerical workers, secretaries, and interns), 48 professionals (art directors, copy writers, account executives) and 11 managers (general manager, executive creative director, business director).

Although Phoenix is organized along departmental lines, the lines are fuzzy and

duties overlap. People chip in whenever necessary. Sometimes freelancers are called in to handle specialized activities or to help ease workload, but these freelancers only come infrequently, and they become part of the core group of the company.

Phoenix has a very simple hierarchy. The two core departments, namely the account servicing and the creative, occupy the middle strata, within which there are only three to four rank levels. On top of it, there is management level, with the general regional director occupying the top, followed by the two important executive creative directors and two business directors. The bottom of the hierarchy is composed of the rank and file and some assistant professionals. They include some studio and department assistants, secretaries, receptionists, office helpers in the cleaning and the pantry and people in the accounting department and computer department. Although the professionals in the accounting and computer department might earn more than the lower middle strata in the hierarchy and carry titles of the manager grade, they do not get involved in the core dynamics of the advertising agency. Their functions are more auxiliary.

From the description above, Phoenix resembles the top-down hierarchical format

of the modern 'office' and there exists a formal structure which every one works there consciously acknowledges. However, ascending the bureaucratic ladder in the case of Phoenix makes sense only for the people in the two core departments of account servicing and creative.

Lily, besides being the assistant to the creative department, provides also secretarial services for the two executive creative directors. She is occupying an important role of mediator regarding the operation of the creative department. When asked whether she had ever thought of transferring to be a creative practitioner, her answer gave us some hints of the meaning of promotion in an advertising agency:

"I never thought seriously about that before. You know, I'm just a secretary! Although I dare to say that I'm quite familiar with what is happening here (the daily operation in the creative department), I don't think I am really capable for the job. After all, I have no qualification or skill for that. Moreover, no one who really wants to get to the top of it (the advertising field) would start from a position like a secretary, or even a media coordinator. There are only two ways: starting from an account executive or from a creative. There's no other way."

From Lily's comments, we can clearly see that the hierarchical order in Phoenix, though simple, is open for the core professional people of the account servicing and the creative department. Departments besides these two only serves supplementary or auxiliary functions and their staff are denied access to the upper

levels. Flora the regional director further illustrates this hierarchical order by way of a discussion of the promotion issue:

“Promotion here, like other well established companies, requires first qualification and second expertise. That’s all. Of course I am referring to the account servicing and the creative. If you are in the computer department, you can get up one to two grades, depending on the culture of the agency he is working at, and your salary would increase with your experiences, but you can’t get to the top. Simply because you are not really advertising people. Of course you can find some cases in which the top managerial executives of some famous multinational enterprises were ‘hunted’ to be the regional directors of some advertising companies. But this is another story. I am not being snobbish, but this scenario applies only to a very limited number of people – the upper managerial circle. Moreover, what an advertising company tries to find is the right kind of person. We might find people who are familiar with the operation of advertising, or someone who started as adverting people but who become our clients. It would seldom be the case that we ‘hunt’ people from the banking and finance corporation. So, if one wants to launch his or her career in advertising, one has to be involved in the core activities of advertising. They are the substance of our profession.”

The emphasis on the ‘core activities’ and the right access to be able to move upward in the career path clearly shows that the structure of Phoenix is an instance of the professional bureaucracy. Experiences count only if they are based on the ‘merits’ which are relevant to the ‘core’ professional activities that define the business of advertising. In Phoenix, most directors and managers at the managerial level are from the accounting servicing branch or the creative branch. Bosco and Mark are the exemplary cases. Working as partners for a decade, one specializing in

copywriting and the other in visuals, their career trajectory can be analogously portrayed as a guerrilla adventure for prizes. Although they had already earned their fame in the advertising field in the early 90's by producing a series of advertising campaigns for an eyeglasses company, they had to accumulate their expertise as well as experiences in a decade in order to attain the prominent position they are now occupying. In their career, they moved four times and all the companies which they worked for before were prominent 4As agencies.

Mark talked about their career (with Bosco) in the advertising field:

“Our history is a lucky history because we were brought to fame by a series of good campaigns in our early careers, but it still took us over ten years to move to the management level. There is no short cut in this business. Outsiders have many misconceptions about the advertising business. They often think that the advertising career is an ‘elevator’ career and you can go as fast as you could up to the top if you have talents. This is a myth. We are a ‘modern’ organization like other professional businesses. We require for entry some relevant legitimate qualifications, not necessarily degrees in the traditional sense, but qualification is a must. If you apply for the senior positions, we also require that you have certain experiences in other ad agencies. Talents come third. Why? Just because the situation is not like twenty years before. There are already some very good universities, schools or colleges in the market. The function of the first two criteria helps exactly to screen out some potentially not suitable applicants. Although we are quite open in admitting some ‘mavericks’, it happens only under the conditions that his or her experiences and talents are relevant to the advertising practice. We won’t accept people coming up to our office showing their private collection of fine art stuff. We are not doing fine art here. We are very cautious about it.”

From the words of Mark, we grasp a general picture of the current situation of the advertising business. The structure of advertising is organized in a rational way, right beginning from the recruitment stage. Credential is an important criterion, just like other professions, for the company to get new people into the field. Although we cannot find any universally recognized entry standard that can compare to that of law and accounting, there is available a large pool of appropriate candidates who have the right credentials. We can here assert that advertising business is basically aligned on a rational basis. 'Mavericks' are not generally welcomed.

From the above comment, we can assert that, despite some degree of flexibility in the admission process, the case of Phoenix displays similar bureaucratic traits as other business firms regarding career and promotion in a hierarchical line-up. However, this general portrayal of career path is used to describe those who are working for the core activities in an advertising agency. There is no legitimate way for a production assistant, or even an IT professional, to move up the career ladder in an advertising agency. It is demonstrated in the case that some 'offices', though aligned in a hierarchical order, are denied access to higher levels.

The 'bureaucratic' trait of a set of impersonal rules and regulations is also evident in Phoenix. The first sign of the pervading presence of rules and regulations is the official notices and amendments regarding offices rules. They cover nearly all the aspects concerning the office life of an advertising company, i.e. the rules regarding an non-smoking office; amendments concerning a dental scheme; procedures concerning courier and dispatch; policy change regarding expense control; amendment on the reimbursement procedure; work arrangements during emergency, etc.. One can easily notice that there are lots of 'papers' circulating in the daily operation in Phoenix and people work there do pay their concern to or even make use of them. Lily, the personal secretary to the two executive creative directors, made these remarks,

"You find the right person! (In response to my question of memos, notices and paper works) I'm not the one who made up these stuffs but I'm part of those who are implementing them. They are my daily work. Of course there might be some who don't even bother to have a look of them, but I think, in our company, those are only limited to a very few number. Some body might dislike, or be outraged by some recent policies of the company, but they might at least have a glance of it in order for them to react. Then, I'm fulfilling my job. Those are the unhappy situations, but most of the time, the notices, memos and newspaper cuttings spreading around are just to let them know what is happening here right now. They might know before hand of what was happening here (inside the creative department), but they might have no idea of what happened to our regional director in the press release yesterday."

Lily kept on elaborate on the function of the display of messages:

“What you are seeing here is already a practice going on long before I come here. The situation now is that we would display those important and humorous stuffs in paper forms, basically A4 in size but sometimes A3 in size, making them visible to every one in the company. For some general notices and memos, we would circulate them by email. People here would talk about it, whether it be good or bad news.”

In Phoenix, there is an official tiny little handbook available for all staff members.

It specifies some general but very important policies and procedures of the company. These include general terms for appointment, office procedures, hours of work and leave, pay allowances and benefits and condition for termination of services. More importantly, the handbook also outlines the conducts proper for dealing with confidential information and ethical conduct regarding accepting gifts and bribery from clients. It provides the framework upon which the conduct and behaviours of all staff members are expected to follow. There is available a whole set of application forms for ‘leave’ matters (sick leave, annual leave and leave cancellation, etc.), borrowing of company equipment (video camera, camera, TV and press commercial archive, studio accessories, etc.), reimbursement, and office facilities. There is also available various kinds of forms for record and brief,

including creative briefs, production briefs, campaign planning, reviews and evaluations.

Lily said, *“They must fill in the forms for leave and reimbursement in order to leave and reimburse money. Because it concerns not only our department, we should let the others (accounting department, the general office, etc) know in order to make it work.”*

When directly asked about ‘bureaucracy’, Flora, the regional director also gave us some hints on the issues relating to rules and regulations,

“Bureaucracy? I seldom use that word. To me, it is for administration and it is out of an operational necessity. I believe that we have a rather free and liberal environment here, but one must provide some grids for work to operate. There must be some official procedures for people to follow. The rules are there to help protect the person as well as to protect the company. Another good example I can give you relates to the working hours (Laugh!). There are still misconceptions outside about our advertising people. Some might think we are the ‘rebels’, working hard but so wild that no attention would be given to rules and regulations. Our official hours are nine in the morning to five thirty in the afternoon, but most of our staff here come after nine, most of them around nine thirty but seldom do they come in after ten. Is it a violation of rule? Yes, I admit, according to the black and white. But people in the creative and account servicing work much later than the specified hour of leaving and they do possess a sense of self discipline. They know that they can be a little bit late yesterday, but not for today. Why? Because they realize that there is a general meeting held today, or there is a meeting scheduled with clients at nine thirty in the office, so they come back at nine or even at half past eight.”

The question of whether the people in Phoenix is self-motivated to discipline

themselves is debatable, but people in Phoenix do come together regularly for scheduled meetings and conferences. These meetings can be roughly categorized into three types: discussions on overall strategy and mission of the company, updating the company's development and promoting a company 'culture', and evaluation and education. Lateness for or absence from these general meetings might subject ones to some symbolic fines such as memos specifying the absentees' names and 'tea time' treats as fines.

We can briefly conclude that there are lots of 'bureaucratic' traits even in a 'creativity-driven' advertising agency like Phoenix and they are consciously or unconsciously observed by people working there. The top-down hierarchy, albeit in a simpler form, laid out the format in which people follow and implement the assignments from upper 'offices'. Moreover, it also provides a horizon upon which people of the core services project and define their career. Rules and regulations, coming with a bulk of paper works and an archive of digital records, are also generally acknowledged by the people working in this company. All of the above shows that Phoenix is running as a 'bureaucracy' that is basically rational and impersonal in its nature.

6.3 Team Working in Phoenix

That we begin this section with issues relating to the format of team working is not an arbitrary choice. Although some negative consequences of bureaucracy like rigidity, the inability to change and the rule-abiding pressures that might lead to the downplaying of substantive goals and the then 'loss of meaning' are all important, the issues of 'team working' give us a window to how bureaucracy actually works. It is apparently a challenge to the Weberian 'bureaucracy' thesis because it integrates the over-divided and over-specialized work tasks and recomposes it in a new format known as a 'team'. Structurally speaking, it has already laid out the format for transcending the difficulties of bureaucracy in the context of the advertising environment, but we will later find out that the essential problems and the difficulties that bureaucracy creates in relations to innovation and creativity cannot be totally resolved by this device. Thus, it is very important to evaluate how far this format helps to smoothen and remedy the 'routinization' problem and what are the problems left unsolved in spite of the adoption of the team work format in a bureaucratically structured organization.

The format of team is so common and so widespread that the practitioners in the field take its existence for granted and regard it as the most normal device for

practising advertising. Bosco once commented:

“It is our way of doing things. I can’t imagine if it is possible for the copywriter to work alone without the help of the art designer. It also doesn’t make sense to me if the creatives are working in isolation without listening to feedbacks from clients. The account servicing, on the other hand, has nothing substantial to communicate to the clients if they are cut off from the updated development of the creative. Team working is one of the essentials in our advertising field.”

Vicky, the art director, described ‘team’ as the ‘daily thing’. Tammy, the copywriter, said that “it’s the way how we relate to each other here”. Jane, the account manager, remarked that “people here are always connected this way”. The above comments show that team working a very common platform which an advertising agency adapts to organize its core work force.

In the case of Phoenix, we can observe that work teams are composed of people from different departments, or even people recruited on a short-term basis from outside the company to lend force to its advertising campaigns. In practice, clients, we have mentioned in the previous chapter, are also included, though not officially, in ‘teams’. Since the team in Phoenix is quite small in size, with six to seven persons from the account servicing and the creative department to form the core members and one or two persons from other fields to act as its occasional members,

the interaction inside the team is very frequent and the relationship is rather close and personal. It does help a lot in overcoming the rigidity and the ‘impersonality’ known to most of bureaucratic structures.

6.3.1 Team working: the format facilitating creativity

The phenomenon of team has long existed in the field of advertising before scholars in the Post-Fordist literature (Vallas, 2001) described it as a device that challenges the Fordist paradigm in its horizontal realignment of the work relationships and the reunification of manual and mental divide.

Bosco gave a short history of ‘team’:

“Team working is the tradition of advertising and it is also our daily activities. We are just following the tradition. It is a tradition that can be traced back to the early twentieth century American advertising firms when these firms were no longer satisfied with playing a ‘broker’ role and included in-house a group of talented people to do copy writing and designs. Sales people began to working side by side with the creative people. It developed and included more talents from different fields as the commercial world became more complex, the technology became more advanced and the media became more varied. Because we need the advice of the media people in order to consciously devise a positioning plan, the knowledge of the experienced directors to help to visualize the images, the updated research data to help us to formulate the strategy and most importantly, the constant feedbacks of clients to figure out what they really want. It is still developing, I think. For instances, the industry now is in need of the IT workers for doing the internet advertising.”

We can tell from Bosco's remarks that 'team' can tailor to the practical needs of the campaign and it is so flexible that the incorporation of the talents needed is theoretically unlimited. It serves as a working platform wherein different talents can be put together in a more personal manner, so that communication between different departments, as well as job positions, can be more responsive and interactive. It is in this sense that the over-specialized tendency of the bureaucracy can be rectified. More importantly, it helps to reduce the rigidity of the hierarchical structure of the bureaucracy. Tammy, when asked whether she would follow the ideas of the team leader, said:

"It all depends on whether his or her idea is grounded. If it is unreasonable, or not practical, or doesn't make sense at all (Laugh!), I would stand firm on my position."

The flow of authority command is not always observed in the team platform. In Phoenix, the team format is satellite-like and the core members are composed of the account servicing and creative staff who might handle one to several campaigns at a given period of time. So, overlapping in memberships is frequent. Each team is formed according to the campaign at hand, so the component members would be different each time. There is a leader, always from the senior strata, who

acts as symbolic head of the group and is responsible for drawing together the opinions and viewpoints of its members. But decisions are always made together. In fact, it is not the intention of those who lead to assert or apply his or her authority in the team working environment. Charles made the following note on the meaning of leading a team:

"I think sometimes it's not easy to take on this role. Mainly because I can't impose my idea on them, it would weaken the flow of ideas, especially during the brain-storming process. The leader is rather the arbiter in the team. Besides, the leader is also the initiator. This is also not a good position to take since I have to make up something to trigger them to develop further. But, you know, sometimes the nonsensical 'murmur' is so unreasonable and laughable that even I myself cannot help to laugh at it. This is especially the case during the starting period when 'dead air' is all around and I have to make up something to say."

Charles' description tells a lot about the function of team in Phoenix. The leader in the team, as symbolic head, has to facilitate the 'flow of ideas' and he or she has to be very alert all the time to not to impose his personal judgement on any ideas. In addition, he has to take initiative in opening a conversation, breaking 'dead air', as well as easing tension when conflicts occur. In a sense, the leader in the team is serving the function of mediator and facilitator, rather than an authority-charged senior command giver as in a normal 'bureaucracy'.

We know from the above that the working team does help to ease the rigidity and over-specialized tendency of the bureaucracy, but what is more important to our thesis is whether the team can directly contribute to creativity. Charles gave an answer on this question:

“It is very difficult to answer. To me, team working can facilitate the communication process and get rid of unnecessary delay or misunderstanding. However, I don’t think it can substantially help to create something. It all depends on whether the members in team can understand the advertising problem in a very mutual way. What I say doesn’t mean that members in a team have to perceive the problem in the same way. Rather, what is more important is that they can complement each other’s talents. If a team can ideally work in this way, it would on the one hand help to ‘accelerate’ the development of the idea and on the other hand help to develop the idea in different but complementary directions. It happens, though not all the time, when there is ‘chemistry’ between members.”

Charles’ answer is important in that it helps to clarify the main function of team in this kind of professional bureaucracy. Team, in his words, helps to ‘facilitate the communication process’ and this remark points out that the core activities of the advertising business is embedded in, though not equal to, a communication process. More importantly, ‘team’ functions to protect the communication process from ‘unnecessary delays and misunderstanding’ characterizing most bureaucracies.

In the viewpoint of Charles, the platform of team helps at least to release tensions

generated from the over-specialized tendency of the bureaucracy and helps to create an environment facilitating communication. Although creativity in any substantial sense is not a direct outcome of team working, a good communication platform is nonetheless an indispensable factor in facilitating creativity. The 'ideal' portrait of a team wherein its members can mutually relate to and communicate with each other gives us some hints about what a 'good' team is. But the real situation is far from the ideal. In the following section, we would try to explore the elements of constraints in the tendency of 'routinization' in team working. The question of whether the team in Phoenix can really help to facilitate creativity would then be answered afterwards.

6.3.2 Routinization in team working

Life in teams is sometimes depicted as being a stressful experience in which individuals are subject to intense peer pressure to conform to group norms (Barker, 1993). Although we cannot find much evidence in showing that the decision power in team is restricted to the hands of a leader, there are evidences of peer pressure to conform to the group norms and tendency to 'routinize' itself.

Tammy the copywriter talked about the power of the group norm:

“Although I ‘m quite sure I can stand on my ground to defend my opinion, sometimes I have to surrender to what the majority said. Due to time constraints, we must decide upon a direction to follow on and to elaborate on it, but it is exactly at this point that disagreement might come up. And, you know, there is no right or wrong in the business, so it is better to conform in order to facilitate the process. Because we have lots of other things coming”

The pressure of efficiency (of meeting deadline) sets a limit to a theoretically free environment. Time is a symbol of the most limited resources in the field of advertising. Practitioners cannot afford to indulge in the brain-storming session or in the idea developing stage because deadline has to be met. Contrasting opinions and arguments should come to an end in a specified period of time. The ideal portrait given by Charles in the last section has to be re-evaluated through this limiting factor of time. Although practitioners in the field are educated to be independent regarding their judgements and ideas, their determination and judgement have to be suspended in the face of limited time span dictated by advertising campaigns. It is in this sense that Tammy talked about her conforming to group norms.

People from other departments also feel the pressure for conformity. Mary, the new account executive, talked about her feeling of powerlessness in the face of the

dominant power of the creative,

“Although I might come up with something which I think is a more practical solution, most of the time I dare not voice it out. It might be that I’m new to the field, or it might be that they (the creative) are too dominating over anything concerning ‘idea’. Sometimes I just put up an ‘innocence’ drama in the face of some difficult situations hoping that everything would be fine and every problem finally solved.”

Practicality is downplayed in Phoenix. We observe that the opinions of the account servicing are most of the time overwhelmed by those of the creative people.

Out of the pressure to conform to the dominant voice of the creative in team, the account servicing is usually left with no choice but to keep silent. Routinization begins to surface when opinions and voices in a team are not given equal importance. Concerns which are non-design related or aesthetically irrelevant will lose out in importance. The team, with the skewed tendency to neglect practical concerns, serve to constrain rather than to facilitate healthy creativity.

Besides the imbalance of power between the two core services and the diminishing concern for the practical dimension, personal relationship is another difficult issue in team. Tim, the copywriter, talked about the difficult relationship with Vicky:

“Although our work team is composed of different members every time, the core thing won’t change, or seldom change. Take me as an example: I always have to partner with Vicky. This is the case since I come to this company. But Vicky and I are not good partners – everybody knows it here. So, there are always difficulties in the idea development period. It is especially the case when the main direction has not been formed. I have told Bosco and Mark before about the case, but they reassure us we would work and there are ‘sparks’ as we work together. I personally doubt it.”

Although membership in team is theoretically composed anew each time a campaign is launched, we find from the research that the partnership between the designer and copywriter are quite stable. People are so organized originally out of a good intention to let creative members familiarize with each other’s style. However, the difficult relationship in team might develop into a ‘routinized’ pattern; it might even transform contrasting opinions into personal conflicts. It then might further constrain the possibilities for creativity. Charles the creative director once compared this difficult relationship to a ‘hell’ in the advertising practice. In his own words:

“Sometimes it is not that free in team because we are working upon some guidelines already determined from above. Sometimes it is not that pleasurable in team. If you participate in team long enough, you would sometimes think it is hell. We are in hell most of the time because we turn work into something very personal. It is very easy and natural for some disagreements of ideas to develop into personal conflicts. And that’s not ‘one shot’. It is because the pattern will form and conflict would then recur and recur again. So, maintaining good partnership is very important, in which way things can move

smoother and a little bit faster. Follow the flow and everything would become easier.”

But the real issue at stakes revealed in Charles’ comment is that an intended strategy might be adopted by individual members to refrain from personal judgements in order to avoid conflicts. This might lead members, once again, to conform to the majority’s view. But this conformity is not conformity to rules and regulations as revealed by the ‘bureaucracy’ concept. It is rather out of fear to provoke possible conflicts that lead the members of the team to submit to the group pressures. In the extreme case, the team working format would fall short of its original aim to draw together different talents to facilitate creativity. This is another key factor behind the routinization process.

We can infer from the above that team working can be constraining as well. The bias of downplaying practical concerns, the conformity to the majority voice and the difficulties in personal relationship might combine to weaken the facilitative function of the team. However, the routinized pattern of the team as we observed in Phoenix cannot be interpreted in terms of the automated recurring pattern characterized by an elaborated set of rules and regulations and an obsession with instrumental details. What we find in Phoenix is a pattern which is more

‘irrational’ in its nature. Members in team might suspend their independent judgements and submit to the view of the majority to keep the team running. Members might also intentionally avoid conflicts in the difficult relationship to ‘follow the flow’ and hope that ‘everything would become easier’. Those are the fears behind this particular form of ‘routinization’ pattern.

However, in spite of the above mentioned constraining factors, the format of team is still an indispensable platform for organizing creativity in the advertising environment. It is an ideal platform for a highly interactive and responsive communication process which is an operational necessity for creative practice in advertising. So, we can tentatively conclude that the format of team serves to provide an antidote to the over-specialization as well as the rigidity of the bureaucratic structure, but it tends also to ‘routinize’ in its own way to constrain the possibility of creativity. It begs the question of whether there is something more substantive in its nature that can help to curtail the tendency to constrain creativity. In the next section, we will go to the leaders to see whether they can help to break open the constraints on the one hand and to re-orientate the practice of the practitioners to some substantive values and beliefs on the other.

6.4 Organizing Creativity by Charisma

From the above analysis of the functions of team, we can conclude that the format of team working alone is not a sufficient factor in overcoming the process of routinization in an advertising environment. As mentioned in the last section, the bias against practical concerns, the tendency to conform to the majority's view and the difficult personal tensions are all antithetical to creativity. We would like to see in this section the extent to which the leaders in Phoenix can address the problem by introducing disruptive elements into the environment and help to bring about creativity through charismatic leadership.

6.4.1 Disrupting order

Mark the executive creative director talked about some devices they are using in breaking some 'routines'.

"Our room (with Bosco) is always open. People in this company 'know' us and they always just step in without any notice. And we welcome them doing that. You don't need an appointment to see us. You'll find us if we are available. Yes, there is a structure here, but I believe that we should not apply 'hierarchy' between people. The departments are also important, but to a very limited extent. We believe that people should join together and contribute their parts to the campaign. There is really no boundary in the real sense. We are all individuals, with different talents. The people of the account servicing are no less creative than us, albeit their speciality is always in the field of marketing and practical concerns. There is no double standard here and the effort of the

account servicing will be totally admired, provided that they are not 'pleasing' the client. It is their responsibility to remind the creative and to bargain with them. If there is any problem, just go directly to us. We would not directly interfere with the problem because we believe that they need to resolve it themselves. But we would give our support, encouragement as well as our advice."

We can tell from what Mark said that the leaders in Phoenix try to fashion a 'liberal' rule based on communication and negotiation. People, in their view, are judged not by their positions but by how their abilities can contribute to the campaign. The account servicing is 'no less creative' than their creative colleagues and they are encouraged by the leaders to go directly to them if their advice or suggestions are downplayed by the creative. This kind of 'liberal' rule opens an opportunity for transcending the bureaucratic order as well as breaking down the pattern of routine. However, the leaders are very cautious about being too intervening. In the following comment of Mark, we would see how they try in their very best to keep their intervention to the minimal:

"Bosco and I are from the creative background. What we are doing now is to try to strike a balance. The creative driven context is a merit and it is a more favourable environment to let creativity to prosper, so it must be maintained. But we are at the same time well aware of the tendency for the creative to neglect something very practical. It really takes time for them to learn that practical concerns are part of creativity and over emphasis on the aesthetic side might hinder rather than assist the growth of creativity. The function of account servicing is thus to remind them. If they fail too, then we'll have to do something about it. We would provide some guidelines to them right at the initial stage or

just tell them they are off the track after the idea is formulated, but we seldom interfere in the middle of the development process. We believe that it is a learning process for them too and people can learn only from mistakes.”

The freedom for the creative to improvise is still there and it is theoretically unlimited. The creative practitioners are still allowed to fully utilize their imagination in devising and visualizing ideas, but not so extreme as to indulge in fantasy. The account servicing are at the same time encouraged to be more out-spoken, daring to speak up for ‘practical’ concerns in spite of the emphasis on aestheticism by the majority. In other words, there is available a device to counteract the ‘routinized’ tendency of team working. But the way the leaders apply this device is characterized by patience and caution and direct intervention is seldom applied.

In view of the strategy used by the creative leaders to disrupt the order on the one hand and remedy the over emphasis on aestheticism on the other, the strategy adopted by the leaders to contain the personal tensions in team is important.

Bosco commented on this issue:

“This is the most difficult part. We did try in many ways to improve the situation, but you know, the kind of counselling stuff is not our specialty. Moreover, it is very ‘time-demanding’ and we can’t afford to do it all the time. So,

we go back to the most elemental. We believe that it need not be any personal conflict if all the eyes are directed towards the goal of making a good campaign. It shouldn't be like that and it needn't be like that. So, we think that all the troubles they find in the personal relationships tell a lot about their own troubles. It is a mirror. The anger you are directed at somebody reflects only that you've too much anger in yourself. We believe it's really a truth, so we just give them a lecture on this topic. Our thinking is that: personal conflicts, if they have to happen, are endless and the counsellor's job would then be endless. So, it's much better to let them face it and decide for themselves whether it's really good to argue and engage in bad relationship for differences of opinions. Our responsibility is to say it out [about the truth they hold], but whether it succeed or not is beyond our control."

The leaders are using a strategy much like 'preaching' and they are trying to abstain themselves in getting into the real conflicts of their colleagues. All they do is to lead their fellow colleague to see and think in their unique way and assure them that their ideas could work. The issue of whether the personal conflicts can really be solved, and how they can be solved, fades into the background.

6.4.2 Cultivating creativity

The leadership of Mark and Bosco is very much coloured by a very obvious 'educational' tone. But this 'education' is of no similar kind to the academic one. It is much more characterized by experience rather than theoretical knowledge and the emphasis is always on the dimension of 'experiencing'. This background philosophy is closely knitted into their view of advertising. In Mark's words:

“Advertising is half science and half poetry. The former would finally end up in a professional service very carefully formed into a strategic science aiming at the market. Of course, it is supported by analytically well defined research tools. The latter part, we would say, is about magic. It’s about talents. It’s about ‘nurturing’. It can’t be rushed. It needs time to mature. Both are important. For the former, we are trying in a very conscious way to state it out in a clear and precise way for our colleagues, our clients and the public to understand. But for the latter, the shape and form of the so called creativity cannot be indoctrinated and cannot be dictated. That’s what originality is. What we can do is to give them more space and time to try out new things. That’s all. There’s nothing more that can be done but wait. Patience and wait. Wait for the wine to mature.”

In their opinions, creativity is something that ‘cannot be rushed’. It needs time to ‘mature’. They realize that cultivation is indispensable for creativity to prosper and the most proper way to cultivate is to give their fellow colleagues enough time to familiarize with different arts and cultures. The rationale behind is their belief that individuality and independent thinking are prerequisites for good creativity.

In fact, the creative people of Phoenix generally express an inclination to learn and do new things. In our interviews with them, they indicate that the constant learning and improving their knowledge is a major attraction that the agency offers.

Vicky gave us some hints about the learning atmosphere:

“They’ve (Bosco and Mark) been giving me a lot of space, I can have all my private stuff and private music here, you see! They [pointing at two creative staff in the room nearby] are allowed to keep their skateboards and totem (a big giant dummy) here. It’s fun here but I’m constantly learning. In general, I’ve been constantly learning since I’ve been here...One of the things I like being here is that I’m almost always learning something new...You may do it wrong, or you don’t know what you’re doing, but you do it anyway.”

It is no accident that the elements of cultivation and education assume such a prominent position in their philosophy. Bosco, for nearly three years, has taken up a part time teaching job in the School of Design in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Mark, on the other hand, is busy researching for his doctoral degree in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. In exchange, they would get some professors or lecturers from the universities to offer some seminars or talks for their creative colleagues. The creative people are all happy to attend these activities since some of the talks are scheduled in office hours, meaning that they don’t have to work for a couple of hours. Other ‘extra curricular’ activities like seeing a movie together at around late afternoon time (they normally work until seven or eight in the afternoon), ‘chit-chat’ or brain-storming at some well-decorated café or restaurants are welcome by the creative people in the agency. Mark talked about the ‘extra-curricular’ activities:

“We are just doing all these in our own way. We remember that those are the

things we want to do when we were young. The content of the 'educational kit' is secondary. Finally, you can't tell what contributes to creativity. A sense of freedom, I think, is important because it serves to trigger creativity. Ideally, different people would come up with different thinking for the same input. We don't want standardized things and, I believe, they don't want it either. In addition, advertising don't need a particular style and it needs all kinds of styles. The clients would not be happy if we keep on giving them similar things. They need different styles and they need different people with different qualities. So, you see, creativity means different qualities. That is our real 'capital'."

The 'curriculum' prepared by the leaders is of course unconventional in the sense that the input material is no 'high art' things, nor is it very 'cultural' according to the academic standard. They are rather some ordinary information and things extracted out of the context of the local popular culture. However, from the point of view of the leaders, the importance of these 'extra-curricular' activities lies not in the content. What is most important is the way the leaders present these to their fellow colleagues. Their charisma functions exactly at the moment they are taking the lead to break the rule and order in an ordinary environment. The fellow colleagues, on the other hand, share in belief as well as in action with their vision at these extra-ordinary moments. So, we can say that the making of charisma is two-way and the leaders cannot go without the followers.

Moreover, we can also observe another important consequence in the joint action of breaking order, that is, the integrative function of the charismatic actions.

People are united when participating together in some extraordinary action or sharing some extraordinary belief. The formal order is destroyed but realigned in a much more dynamic form at the same time when the leaders call for extraordinary actions. The sense of freedom is the basic feeling felt by the participants. Infused with a sense of freedom, they are uplifted above the old order and the feeling of an 'iron cage' experienced in the routinization process is swept away. Furthermore, the workers are re-integrated in a new direction lighted up by the visions of the charismatic leaders. The content of the 'visions' are secondary as compared to the erupting force of the charismatic vision itself. Interpreted in this way, we can say that creativity is characterized less by content than by the energy it shows in its action.

We can briefly conclude that the charismatic leadership in Phoenix serves in a very important way to help to disrupt the bureaucratic order in an advertising environment. The leadership preaches and organizes by 'vision' and leads and integrates in their extraordinary actions. The ordinary bureaucratic order is lifted and a sense of transcending order is given to the practitioners under the charismatic vision of the leaders. It is under the protection of this particular kind of leadership that creativity in the environment of the agency concerned possesses a

space far larger than the other agencies.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP

7.1 Introduction

This chapter is at the same time a continuation of an investigation of the concept of 'charisma' started in the previous chapter and a further exploration into its embodiment, that is, the leadership in Phoenix. With the help of the Weberian definition, charisma is here understood to be "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional qualities" (Weber, 1968: 358). These qualities are the substance upon which the leaders, whether consciously or unconsciously, build their own philosophy and develop their leadership. Thus, the leadership of the charismatic kind differentiates itself from those of some traditional and rational-legal sources. It basically follows no routine as the other two sources of authority. Rather, it gets its momentum, or revives itself, exactly at the very moment it breaks the prescribed order of the system. It is in this sense that charisma creates a very peculiar kind of authority that belongs not to any established order, but bases itself solely on the whimsical

performances of the leaders concerned.

The performances of the leaders, according to Weber, are signs and proofs for their 'gifts of grace'. This is the definitive element of their charismatic leadership. However, the 'gifts' have to be again and again recognized and reconfirmed by the leaders in each of their exemplary actions, even at the cost of disrupting normality. So, in the process of demonstrating their whimsical power, it might at the same time create tension with the established order. We would like, in our case, to attend to the tensions generated out of violating rules and upsetting order in an advertising environment, in the hope that a deeper meaning of the disorderly behaviors can be deciphered. So, in the chapter, we would devote a section to explore the issue of the disorderly behaviors of the leaders after a brief account of the composition of the leadership.

But the mystery of the charisma would not be solved without an exploration of the belief of the charismatic leaders. It is upon the 'calling' of a different order that the leaders acquire their 'extraordinariness'. It is also upon this calling that the leaders commit themselves to their belief, courageously following their own vision without succumbing to extraneous economic concern. An analysis will be made

of the philosophy of the creative leaders in the hope that some central themes can be extracted for illuminating the enigma of their 'extraordinariness'. We would also be interested in how the leaders in an advertising agency lead their followers to share their visions in the attainment of goals that cannot be confined by the goal of profit maximization alone.

Last but not least, the belief of the leaders must be perceived and construed by the followers as also their own. In fact, every word and deed that comes from the leaders is understood and recognized to be an opportunity on the part of their followers to reinforce the belief that they have made a good choice to choose, and to be chosen by, the 'chosen one'. It is upon this sharing of vision, a communion, that the mission can be put to its fulfillment. In fact, the charismatic movement involves also the participation of the followers. In the analysis of the dynamic process of leadership, we would bear in mind that leadership is always a two-way process, meaning that it is at the same time a conferment process made out of the participation of the followers.

So, in the last section, we will concentrate on the part of the followers. We will show how the followers lend their support and loyalty while sharing the

extraordinary radiance emanating from the leaders in the process of the construction of the charisma. In the analysis, some attention will be given to some key sub concepts of charisma like 'conversion' and 'calling' and they allow us to understand how integrated and solid the fellowship would be when the intensity of the charisma can be analogously compared to the religious source.

7.2 A Brief Account on the Composition of the Leadership

The real leadership in Phoenix consisted of three persons, the two executive creative directors, Bosco and Mark and the regional director, Flora. Bosco and Mark are often referred to as the 'two creative leaders' throughout the thesis and they are responsible mainly for most of the important creative directions in the agency. Flora, acting as the symbolic head of the Hong Kong branch of the international company, is the official decision maker who watches over the whole of company.

They specialize their talents along three directions: creative planning, strategic planning and management. The first, creative planning, is of course the responsibility of Bosco and Mark and it involves all the decisions and planning concerning creative works. The second, strategic planning, concerns about devising marketing plans and strategies for prospective clients. It is often the works of the account planning director in other companies but it is here in the hands of Bosco and Flora. The third, management, is solely under Flora's control.

We can easily notice that they are overlapping their responsibilities and, in practice, no sharp demarcation can be made for their kind of 'division of labor'. A good

example is Bosco. Although he is from the creative background and a long-term partner of Mark, he is now shifting more to the ‘strategic planning’ role. He explained to me that “it is a very natural process and it would be more beneficial to carrying out the kind of creativity we want”. Mark shares with the above saying,

“He is the right kind of person to go this way. He is more outgoing than me. Although much of the details concerning creative works would be responsible for by me, decisions for some major campaigns are still made together.”

Bosco and Mark, not like the other senior staff at the managerial level, are sharing the same room, with tables arranged alongside each other. In fact, their partnership is deeply grounded in their long-term collaboration for the same mission. It is already a friendship.

The role of Flora can be easily under-estimated, but it in fact serves a very important function to ‘bridge’ and ‘translate’ on the one hand and ‘tone down’ the bizarreness on the other. She is highly appraised in the following narration by Bosco while he traced the origin of this ‘triad’ leadership.

“I remember that when we [referring to Mark and himself] first came to this agency we had several important things to do besides getting new clients. I knew that it would really take time for the agency to adapt to our style, which is free

and spontaneous in its very outlook. It is especially important for people from an account servicing background to know what we try to do for this agency. So, we really need the help from the kind of people like Flora [the regional director], who really knows who we are and let us go our own way. I know that we are quite demanding on her, but we are at the same time very dependent on her. She is the key to sorting problems concerning misunderstandings and misconceptions about us, both for the account servicing staff and for the clients who are not familiar with us.”

The above comment of Bosco shows at least two things: the self-awareness of their peculiar way of doing things and the importance of Flora to rectify the misunderstandings concerning such ‘peculiarity’. In fact, Flora, besides being a tactful negotiator in communications, shows great understanding of creativity. In the following comment on certain advertisements, she showed her deep understanding once again and her support for creativity is very obvious:

“Although clients are the source of our income, we have to be very objective about their demands. For instances, if we both agree that the original aim of the campaign is to make noise on the public, we have to stick to it. Our creativity is to be judged by how it answers the marketing problem, but not by moral standard. If there are really any complaints from media reviews, we will tell the clients ‘don’t panic’, and explain to them that those are also ‘noises’ that might help your brand.”

In the hands of Flora, ‘complaints’ are translated into ‘noises’. This is what Bosco refers to as the ‘key’ in the triad leadership. But it is not easy to become a ‘key’ because it requires, in Bosco’s saying, “a great deal of understanding, empathy and

very solid knowledge in creativity”. So, in spite of the fact that she is not the one who gets actively involved in the production of creativity, the role played by Flora in the leadership is no less important than Bosco and Mark.

However, the importance of Flora in the triad leadership and the role she is playing as a ‘translating device’ reveals a very important feature about the leadership in Phoenix. It is about a ‘core’ which is not easily translatable in the mundane order of a capitalist based organization. It refers to an order not totally fitting into the mechanical order characterizing most of the bureaucratic administration. This core, in Phoenix, comprises only Bosco and Mark and it is mainly because of this core that a realm of charisma results from the leadership and casts its spell on the whole of the company. In the next section, we will go deeper into this ‘core’ and trace the ways it functions to disrupt the normality in an advertising agency as well as to create tensions that are not easily contained in a business environment.

7.3 Disrupting Order and Some Possible Tensions

The special status of the ‘charismatic core’ of Bosco and Mark bears resemblance with what Weber says about the nature of ‘charismatic authority’. “Pure charisma is specifically foreign to economic considerations. Wherever it appears, it constitutes a ‘call’ in the most emphatic sense of the word, a ‘mission’ or a ‘spiritual duty’... What is despised, so long as the genuinely charismatic type is adhered to, is traditional or rational everyday economizing, the attainment of a regular income by continuous economic activity devoted to this end...It repudiates any sort of involvement in the everyday routine world” (Weber, 1968: 244-5). The emphasis on the mysterious foundation and the non-attachment to anything routine or ‘everyday economizing’ by Weber provides some insightful clues for our understanding of charisma as manifested in Phoenix. The former, the mysterious foundation, expresses itself in the form of ‘calling’, which we will deal in details in the next section. In this section, we will concentrate on uncovering the meaning behind the repudiation of the routine order and to see how the unruly actions of the leaders might bring about possible tensions in the advertising environment.

The ‘core’, comprising the two creative leaders, provides a buffer zone for the specialization of creativity. The routine of daily concerns, things that are not

related to creativity and creative strategy planning, is not their business. This point is well captured in the following comment by Flora:

“Although Bosco is now actively involved in meeting with clients and, more accurately, the persuasion process, he is interested only in his strategy. He believes that delivering his own strategy in his own person is part of originality. But I would say it means more fun to him. His focus is not really about persuading clients and in the least about practical aspects of the campaign. All of the routine stuff would still be the responsibility of account servicing. My understanding is that he is trying to bring creativity onto the clients’ table, showing them what real creativity is really about, in a series of performances.”

What Flora has in mind about the recent active participation of Bosco in the ‘meeting with clients’ and strategy planning is an reinforcement, or expansion, of his ‘calling’, his commitment to some extraordinary creative ideals, rather than an example of Bosco’s turning to ‘everyday economizing’. According to Weber, charisma is antithetical to order, routine, predictability and uniformity. Persons who are regarded as charismatic are often thought of as non-predictable, spontaneous, and intuitive. More importantly, they are people guided only by their own rules. The case as mentioned by Flora shows clearly that Bosco is only following his own rule, making use of the formal procedures and the usual environment in the attainment of his own ideal. This is the best scenario, but things or events are not always going to be in their favor. There are also cases in

which conflicts occur when they have to fight against the routine in ways more confrontational, giving us impressions that they are resisting order and disrupting formality in the advertising environment. Jane, the account manager of the account servicing branch, gives us an example of the attitude adopted by the two creative leaders in seeing daily routine:

“There were actually too many cases that can show that they are basically anti-routine, for examples, changing schedules regarding monthly meetings without prior notice, relocating people at meetings to some other places, sudden absence of the whole creative department, etc...But the most unbearable condition always occurs when the clients put the blame on us [the account servicing] for their absentee or inconsistency. We can do nothing but tell the clients that they would soon show up...In general, I can say they are really good leaders, allowing a large degree of autonomy for each member of the company, and very friendly, treating fellows as friends without any ‘high-brow’ attitude. But they are sometimes really too spontaneous and the collaboration becomes so disorganized that people involved might feel frustrating.”

Spontaneity and its extreme manifestation in ways of disrupting order and violating formality are all signs, but not the issue at stakes, of their belief in an order which is paramount as compared to the daily routine constructed out of a bureaucratic order. The above portrayal of the creative leaders as someone who are ‘disorganized’ and ‘too-spontaneous’ is actually a quite natural manifestation of their belief that artist is bound by nothing but his own gut feeling and spontaneity. Jane’s complaint shows rather that the creative leaders would not compromise their belief with the

routine order, even though they are criticized for consequent difficult collaboration. But it cannot be denied that the leaders' insistence on going the spontaneous artist way has become a source of tension in the advertising environment, which stills embodies a structure of bureaucracy for its operational necessity. Tension surfaces whenever the party upholding order is once again trespassed by the leaders. It is logical to include the people in the rank and file and in the account servicing department because they are people whose specialty, as well as domain of work, depends very much on the smooth functioning of the streamlining nature of the routine order. However, in Phoenix, there are much far fewer 'complaints' in the rank and file as compared to the account servicing department. People in the rank and file, though sometimes feeling confused about the ad hoc decisions of the leaders, generally welcome the acts of upsetting rules and order. Lily, the personal secretary to the two leaders, has made an interesting comment on the disorderly behaviors of the leaders:

"I would say I've learnt a lot from them. They are the ones who taught me how to differentiate the necessary from the unnecessary. They always say, 'Save energy for the important'. You know that my main responsibilities include scheduling, disseminating messages and filing. I follow their advice. For examples, I save my energy for the key message and not worrying the format matter. The most important thing is to be fast and precise. So it doesn't matter how many times I have to reschedule or redrafting for them because it just needs a blink of eye's effort."

From the comment of Lily, we can have a glimpse of a 'pragmatic' intention behind the disorderly behaviors. Disrupting order and violating formality is but a consequence of the advocated 'pragmatism'. What we observe in the case of the secretary can also be found among members of the creative department, including the leaders themselves of course. It is a constructive use of energy for the necessary. For the leaders, what is most important is to be creative, even at the cost of generating tension. Putting it under the thematic tension between creativity and bureaucracy, we can assert that it can be constructively served as a useful device for counteracting the routinized tendency, usually characterizing most of the bureaucratic system.

Although Lily's comment represents only the point of view from the creative department, it touches a more important issue underlying the tension arising out of the leaders' disorderly spontaneity. The disavowal of the leaders' 'too-spontaneous' and disorganized management style is not so much concerned about the mere disorderliness as about the power issue. They are actually complaints about the leaders' infringement and the corresponding shrinkage of their own power. Words like 'negligence', 'aloofness', 'disorganized', 'savagery' are

all negative descriptions people from the account servicing side usually use to comment on the leaders. Notwithstanding the fact that they are true descriptions, they are rather grievances from the account servicing about their own powerlessness in face of the dominant power of the leaders. This is especially the case for Felix, who is the head of the account servicing side:

“Sometimes I feel really frustrated about their ‘weird’ way of doing things. I’ve tried my very best to play my role as a ‘middle-man’, a mediator, in the process of the negotiation with client, but I feel as if I was ‘skipped’ over sometimes. I know they are on very good terms with clients and I also know that they have the capability to put something in order out of a mess, but I really appreciate if they can notify me beforehand... I don’t think they are trying to humiliate me by intent, but I really cannot figure out what is going on in their mind.”

Felix’s protest about the abuse of power by the creative leaders is a rather extreme case in advertising agencies, even for the creativity-driven ones. Procedures are repudiated and formal rules are not followed through. The creative leaders in Phoenix create ruptures in everyday normality, generating uncertainty in a business environment basically following a rational order. From the comment of Felix, we know that the unruly behaviors of the leaders create uneasiness not only in the personal relationship, but generating tension across departments as well. The ‘powerlessness’ as experienced by Felix is at the same time a consequence of the leaders’ attempt in trespassing departmental lines. It would be exaggerating to

interpret the repudiation of the formal order as a stance against the compartmentalization of bureaucracy, but it at least reveals that the leaders follow an order not congruent to that of the mundane world. That is why Felix cannot construe the intention behind the unruly behaviors of the leaders, besides sparing them not as a personal attack. The tension triggered by the leaders' disorderly actions is actually a result of the conflict of two different world-views. Quoting Weber once again, "Bureaucratic authority is specifically rational in the sense of being bound to intellectually analyzable rules; while charismatic authority is specifically irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules" (Weber, 1968: 244). It is in this sense that the disorderly actions of the leaders are so incomprehensible. We should note that the disorderly intent is especially sensitive to the 'economizing' mentality. This explains also why the disorderly actions of the leaders produce far less negative responses from the rank and file than from the account servicing department.

Nevertheless, tensions still exist. Flora, being the interpreter as well as the mediator in the leadership, is the one who have to take up the role to curtail any possible discontent.

“There are in fact quite a lot of complaints of this kind, most of them coming from the account servicing side. I try my very best to comfort those who are being ‘hurt’ by defending that those are not signs of disrespect and there’s nothing personal about their behaviors. I want people to understand that the naughtiness and negligence they [Bosco and Mark] sometimes show to people means really no harm. I might explain to people that they are only going into ‘trances’ and they are preoccupied with some weird things in their mind. But, I often emphasize, those weird things are really for the benefit of the company. Yes, that’s all I can do.”

Disorderly behaviors, and its underlying order-disrupting intent, are bound to create tension in a business environment that builds itself upon a format of bureaucracy. They are basically anti-order. But we can notice that the disorderly behaviors are not mere senseless rebellion, but relates very closely to the leaders’ intent to fight against ‘economizing’ mentality, opening up a space for creativity. In the next section, we will see more clearly how the battle for creativity is consciously built into a ‘philosophy’ by the leaders.

7.4 The Expressions of Charisma

According to Weber, it does not matter whether the power bestowed on the charismatic leaders is really come from God's will or some other external sources. What is most important is that there exists a 'calling' in the development of the charismatic leaders. The jargon 'calling', or 'mission', or a 'spiritual duty', is rather a 'recognition' process and it is first of all a 'self-recognition' process: "As a rule, charisma is a highly individual quality...this implies that the mission and the power of its bearer are qualitatively delimited from within, not by an external order" (Weber, 1968: 1113). It is a process of self-enlightenment rather than a revelation imposed by some mystical external sources. In this section we would basically follow Weber's definition to see how the charismatic leaders in Phoenix is "self-determined and set its own limits" (Weber: 1968:1112) in the production of their own charisma.

The awareness is a process and it often requires some leading causes for the charismatic leaders to consciously make a move, to determine for themselves as well as for the public who they really are and what they are proposing. One of the most distinguishing features of their charisma is their 'camouflage' character, their reluctance to assimilate to any school or style. The origin of this 'non-attachment'

attitude can be dated back to the early nineties when they began to acquire fame out of the release of a series of advertisements for an optical company. Mark remembered that it was a shock to him when he realized that they were labeled as specialists in producing ‘sentimentalism’.

“I was really afraid, in spite of the fact that we were getting famous. Although we both loved the campaign, we were really afraid as being labeled as ‘sentimentalists’. Moreover, we began to worry about producing advertisements of the similar kind. We knew at that moment if we continued to indulge in that particular style, our creativity would soon die. Bosco and I talked over the issue again and again until we both got a firm grasp of the idea that style is not important.”

The experience which Mark mentioned can be compared to a ‘conversion’ process, a turning point in which one has to make a choice regarding his career or fate. In their case, it was triggered by their sudden rise to fame in the advertising circle. They have to make a stand, a commitment to their future. After the ‘conversion’, all through the nineties, they continued to explore and to experiment the idea that style is not important. Their philosophy can be found in its most concentrated form in a publication of a book, titled *“Nine Out of Ten Advertisements are Ugly”*, in the year of 2000. It illustrates good enough about their ‘minimalist’ strategy and ‘no-fanciness’ attitude regarding the production of advertising and the treatment of creativity. What they advocate is a very ‘pragmatic’ attitude towards creativity and

a heightened awareness of the fact that advertising is basically a culture. In

Bosco's words:

"It helps to eliminate many misunderstandings about us. And we can shed off the burden that we are creating a very particular style of creativity."

To the leaders, creativity is no mystical thing. Rather, it is a war launched at repetition and inertia that we have to fight in the daily practice. Under the leadership of Bosco and Mark, the 'non-identification to any particular style' is so emphasized that it becomes a kind of 'dictum' for their daily life at work. Mark, at an interview, made this point in a very clear and unambiguous way:

"We shouldn't be bound by any style or confined in the prison of any stylistic movement. This would weaken the creativity rather than strengthen it. This is the first dictum that we always remind ourselves of. This is also the dictum that we want our fellow colleagues to follow through. We might teach nothing to them but we will encourage our fellows to try different things and to develop in different directions. However, when we notice that some ones are indulging in a particular style, we'll immediately tell them to stop, or in a more indirect way, try to divert their attention to something else. We believe that it is our responsibility to remind anybody who goes off the track."

The emphasis made by Mark on the importance of the 'non-identification to any style' can be interpreted as a reluctance to depend on, indulge in and surrender to the 'means', even if it were the necessary tool for creativity. We observe that there

is a very strong intention for the creative practitioners in Phoenix, under the leadership of Bosco and Mark, to undermine, or even deny, the importance of ‘means’ in the daily practice of the advertising work. This attitude is manifested by the leaders and their followers in many different kinds of behavioral pattern in the agency. The pattern of breaking order, as we mentioned in the previous chapter, is actually a very conscious effort for both the leaders and the followers to disrupt the bureaucratic order, which, to the creative practitioners in the agency, is a prison house built upon ‘means’.

The use of ‘non-identification’ strategy is no doubt a milestone in the leaders’ ‘charismatic’ journey, but their ‘spiritual duty’ cannot come to fruition if something more substantial is not incorporated in their philosophy. ‘Minimalism’, at this point, comes to aid and add more substantial elements to their philosophy. In the previous section, we have a first glimpse of it in the case of Lily. The attitude of ‘saving energy for the necessary’ that we have mentioned in the Lily case is only a variation of this central theme of ‘minimalism’. Bosco, in an interview, explained the concept by making use of the metaphor of ‘DNA’:

“The DNA of the advertising works we produce is in fact very short but containing complete information. They are short and they are powerful. But

they possess power only because they are interpreted in reference to their ‘mother body’. That is, the local culture of Hong Kong. We assume and try to take into consideration the background and the context of our culture. ... We believe that everything should be decoded through the prism of the local ‘lens’ if they are to be effective in the market. Positioning is the first principle in marketing studies and it deals not with real and tangible reality but the reality inside people’s head. If we put all the things about the product in an advertisement, this ad would be doomed to failure.”

The first important thing in the above comment from Bosco that we should take note of is their pragmatic attitude. The metaphor of ‘DNA’ describes well enough that they are concern only with essential message which should be short enough to remain powerful. For the leaders, less is more and they believe that “communication is a contextual process; we don’t have to explain everything, we can say very little to communicate a lot”. So, in order for this minimalism to work to its maximum advantage, the context has to be incorporated in the creativity process. It is upon this background that advertisements are to be decoded and understood.

The emphasis on culture and the concomitant downplaying on style echoes very intimately with what we have mentioned in the previous chapter about their way of leading their followers. The ‘cultural’ inputs that the leaders brings to their followers and the belief in ‘cultivation’ are all circling around this central theme of

‘culture’. In fact, for the creative leaders, this culture refers, in its most concrete form, to the local culture of Hong Kong. This is the reference of their mission and all the commitments are finally directed at this final target. In the following comment of Vicky, we can clearly see that the mission is well absorbed in the creative practice of the followers:

“We always ‘shock’ the audience, but this ‘shocking’ would only be effective if they are familiar with something in the ad, no matter it be the atmosphere, a song, a ‘parochial’ phrase or the staged situation, etc. At this point, we have to be very analytical and objective, testing them in different ways. Sometimes putting some totally different elements on top of each other will bring good result. At other times, it would be better to ‘cut out’ something from its original context. But you must have something in our advertisement that people can make reference to.”

Again, style is only a pragmatic choice while ‘cultural elements’ that “people can make reference to” are the substance occupying their way of thinking in the creative practice. More importantly, we clearly see that the ‘mission’ is well internalized in the being of the followers and it is being executed in the daily practice of their creative works. It is a very good illustration of the partaking of the ‘extraordinariness’ emanating from the creative leaders.

The concern for, and the commitment to work for, the local culture of Hong Kong

provides the key to the enigma of the charismatic core of Bosco and Mark. It is in fact their 'duty' of taking the career of advertising professional. It is also a 'calling', for both the leaders and their followers, to participate in a cultural mission to work for the cultivation of the local culture in Hong Kong. Furthermore, it also explains why people who are bored with the mechanical order of the bureaucracy in most of the commercial office life are attracted and called by the leaders to participate in the mission for a new advertising life. In the next section, we will concentrate on how the followers are called to join and take part in this charismatic movement.

7.5 The Fellowship of the Charismatic Leadership

In this section, I would like to show that fellowship is part of the process of leadership in Phoenix. For the followers, the underlying force behind the process of following a leader is the recognition that the lack of ‘extraordinariness’ in themselves and the desire to partake of it from sharing the ‘visions’ of the leaders. In other words, the followers tend to see and perceive their leaders as endowed with exceptional qualities far exceeding their own. Thus, while most of the creative practitioners start their entry to the profession as low-paid employees without clear vision of success, they still regard following the creative leaders as worthwhile to take. Dave, a creative director, gave us a viewpoint quite representative of this charismatic fellowship:

“No one would choose to work for a small 4A. From a utilitarian point of view, it is unwise to be here. It doesn’t possess the support as the other big ones. Money is a bit lower. More importantly, it doesn’t help much if you include this experience in your resume. But we all know that we come here to learn, to learn that we are all capable of doing something big. We also know that we come here because of Bosco and Mark, not because they can provide something big for us, but that they would help us to discover something big in ourselves.”

From the comment of Dave, we know that there is actually very little ‘utilitarian’ value to work in Phoenix. Dave is right to say that the credibility of the agency, which is a more valuable asset for the advertising practitioners, is not attractive as

compared to some other big 4A agencies. People come here, at least for the creative practitioners, mainly because of the ‘extraordinariness’ of Bosco and Mark. They want to join in the fellowship to learn as well as to discover something they wouldn’t find in some other advertising agencies. Another follower, Tammy, tells about her ‘discovery’.

“I believe that I come here mainly because of creativity, not money or any career promise. But only when I finally came here did I realize that the most special thing about Bosco and Mark is that they won’t teach you any golden rule about creativity. Rather, they will guide you how to unlearn from what you have learnt from other agencies. This really helps to break down the barrier obstructing me for so long. I realize then the most important thing is to develop a creativity particular of my own.”

It is as if the followers are ‘called’ by the creative leaders to participate in a journey of discovery and this discovery is inner-directed. It is more of a self-discovery, related to some personal values rather than to some extraneous ones, like power and money. Here the creative leaders act as a ‘prophet’ or a ‘guide’ who lead, reminding and helping their followers’ journey. The relationship is personal, which can be comparable to one between a master and his apprentices. In our case, we notice that the followers generally feel indebted to the creative leaders. Besides praising their leaders for their management style and expertise on creativity, most of the followers showed their gratitude regarding all the learning experience they can

get at the agency under Bosco and Mark's leadership. Some even see those experiences as some kind of 'starting over' again in their advertising careers. The following case of Susan, though a bit extreme, demonstrates very well about a sense of 'conversion' some might experience under the leadership of Bosco and Mark:

"Although my background as a magazine journalist has helped me a lot in control of writing – at least, I can write for different styles and for different purposes, it at the same time limits my development. It is Mark who taught me how to write for advertising. He is the one who taught me that sometimes it doesn't have to make sense for the words and the sentences. It is more important to make a sense in the minds of the people. It has nothing to do with linguistic or good writing. He told me that copywriting is about the function of words and sentences, in combination with the visuals. It is really eye-opening when I first heard about it. ... I remember that it was the time when I first came to the field. Although confident about my writing skills, I struggled for nearly a year's time in self-doubt about whether I should stay for advertising. It's all because of Mark that I decided to stay and made a commitment to advertising. I felt motivated not because of some motivational nonsense talking but the key to write for advertising."

The case of Susan shows that, under the spell of charisma, the followers have a very special kind of relationship to their leaders. They refer to them not only as boss or superiors of a higher rank in the bureaucratic structure, but 'mentors' or even 'gurus' of some kind. It is very important to note that the guidance or advice given by the creative leaders is interpreted by the followers as some kind of 'alchemical' magic, totally transforming the followers into 'new beings' who now

find advertising very meaningful. The analogy to some kinds of ‘gurus’ can be further illustrated by the case of Tammy,

“I always search for some agency where I can utilize my talents in the most meaningful way. I heard about Bosco and Mark when I worked in some other agencies and I really wanted to come to them because I knew that they are the kind of people I can get along with very well. But I had no access to them. Finally, when I knew that they moved to Phoenix and forming a new team, I just went straight to them. I had not much preparation for the interview, but I just got the feeling that I would work for them. Two days later, I got a call directly from Mark, telling me that ‘we want you immediately’. My answer was ‘I’m already ready’, I recalled.”

Tammy’s case is one of those examples which illustrates very well about ‘the calling’ of the charismatic leaders and followers who are called upon. The story told by Tammy, though not very dramatic, tells a tale of ‘searching for a truth’ or a ‘pilgrimage’. ‘Contact’ can be of different kinds, like ‘preaching’ mentioned in the previous chapter, but Tammy’s case shows its crudest form here. In addition, it is also interesting to note that the relationship between the charismatic leaders and their followers is somehow based on a non-rational ground, if not an unconditional ground. That is why the encounter as recalled by Tammy is interpreted not as any rational planning but as a fulfillment of one’s destiny.

In general, most of the creative staff in Phoenix refers to the job they are holding

now as ‘very meaningful’, and everyone enjoys ‘going for something very important’, and appreciates Bosco and Mark for giving them ‘advice and guidance’ regarding creativity and even ‘excitement’ at work. Nearly all of them have very little negative to say about Bosco and Mark, some might even defend for their leaders about some very obvious shortcomings. For instances, Bosco is often seen as the ‘disorganized’ type of person, which he himself admits as one of his weaknesses as being a leader. However, when asked of whether she shared with this general opinion about Bosco, Vicky reacted in a quite furious tone:

“I don’t like those kinds of talks. I don’t like talking at people’s back. But I can understand why people are always picking at other people: envy and self-pity. What’s wrong about ‘disorganized’? If it is the way he is doing thing, and doing it quite effectively. On the contrary, I personally very appreciate Bosco’s style; at least I think he is more authentic than most other people. We like Bosco for just the way he is.”

It is interesting to note that the defence made by Vicky for Bosco is grounded in what she thinks of a person who is more ‘authentic’. The use of the word ‘authenticity’ can be observed not only in the comment of Vicky, but frequently occurs in the interviews of Bosco, Mark and some other creative staff. It is generally highlighted and insisted in the culture under Bosco and Mark’s leadership. Some other expressions commonly employed in the daily context in the agency like

'heart', 'real', 'truth', etc. are all referring to this concept of authenticity. Although it may denote as well as imply some other deeper meanings, depending on the context of usage, what interests us the most is the 'intensity' the people try to convey to other people about their belief, their way of doing, their aesthetics and their own selves.

Authenticity, accompanying the above-mentioned 'conversion' and 'calling', helps a lot for us to understand the degree of integration and solidarity regarding a charismatic group. They are less concerned about the content than the intense energy driven behind the charisma. So, we might refer the charismatic leadership of Bosco and Mark analogously to some other religious groups; because they share some essential features about a new order transcending the mundane world, a mission committed to actualizing the new order and a devotion to the mission ingrained with strong emotion and feeling.

CHAPTER EIGHT

OPENING TO CHANGE

8.1 Introduction

Normally, changes in the charismatic form of organization centers around two main problems: firstly, finding appropriate successors to the 'throne' of the founding leaders, and, secondly, revitalizing or renewing the visions or missions in face of increasing routinization or changes in the broader environment. However, we have shown in that the advertising business, even in the extreme case we selected for our analysis, basically lines itself up in a bureaucratic structure, with enough stabilizing elements to ensure its continuity and consistency. The account servicing branch, adding all the rank and files and the supplementary services, are in fact following a formal and impersonal model in the very functioning of their daily practice, wherein inconsistency and indeterminacy would be lessened to the minimal. Thus, the problems posed to the conventional charismatic or traditional type of organization, though not irrelevant at all, should be re-addressed in terms of the position taken by the charismatic leadership in relations to a bureaucratic structure.

The problem of changes, in the advertising business, addresses a question of a very different kind. It differs from those addressed by the Post-Fordists as involving some innovative re-arrangement in the very form of its organization and it also differs from those issues of succession crisis, disintegration and coup d'état usually characterizing the charismatic type. It rather refers to the question of changes in 'style'. Theoretically, it is more intimately related to the model of the modern fashion business. It appears as a common practice for the advertising business, like the high fashion brands, to modify, adjust or shift its 'central' styles in a cyclic manner. If the analogy is to be interpreted as only a response to the cycles of fashion in the competitive market is to overlook the capability possessed and conscious effort taken by the advertising business to incorporating changes. The frequent mobility of the creative personnel and the constant changes of leadership in the advertising environment are less of an example indicating instability and succession crisis than good instances expressive of an initiative to change for both the institution and the practitioners.

In the first section, we would like to see in our case how changes happened before the charismatic leadership of Bosco and Mark. Then we will like to account for the changes: the pressures from the outer environment and pressures which grew

out of the 'routinization' problems. A special attention would be given to the attitude and the response of the creative leaders and their followers when facing changes.

Lastly, we would like to show by our selected case in this chapter how the apparent destabilizing charismatic leadership serves as an agent of change that brings forth a regeneration of the business in face of the incessant craving for newness of the capitalist logic. We hope also that, in the process of explication, a sketch of a very special kind of organizational format, tailoring to the needs of most of the creative-driven and style-oriented businesses, can be made out of the advertising example.

8.2 The Coming of the Leaders

Before the coming of the charismatic leadership of Bosco and Mark, Phoenix was an agency with a size approximately the same as it is in the hands of Bosco and Mark. However, the agency lacked a renowned reputation as the other international 4A agencies in Hong Kong as she was shorter in tradition, weaker in manpower and not pioneering enough in creativity. The position she occupied was an embarrassing one, comparatively lower in the scale of 4A agencies, and not as competitive at pricing as the non-4A agencies. It seemed as if she was only one of the Asia-Pacific branches of a good reputed international advertising company, specializing on producing some Hong Kong or Asian versions of some worldwide brands' advertisements. Felix, the head of the account servicing who worked as an account manager before the coming of Bosco and Mark, tells of the situation before the charismatic era of Bosco and Mark:

"Honestly speaking, it was boring at that time. I think it was more boring for the creative. Yes, we [the account servicing] had more say and more power. In fact, we held the party and we planned everything. Why? It is simply because the creative was not needed at that time. There was not much creativity needed to implement a prescribed global plan for some traditional international brands. What was needed, at that time, was our effort – conferences with clients, implementing the modifications they needed, persuading them to spend more on something extra. However, that was not real planning at all. We were just following what others had done before. So, even the account head was only following something or implementing something already prepared and laid out by

the international head quarter.”

It is interesting to note that Felix, as the head of a ‘weak’ account servicing in the era of Bosco and Mark, mentioned in an ironical way how the account servicing held power in the era before Bosco and Mark. His portrait of the past is less of an admiration of the account servicing department’s power at its high time than the discontents he felt about the ‘boring’ nature of the pre-charismatic era. In Felix’s opinion, without the initiatives taken by a strong creative department, Phoenix in the past was only playing the game of a string puppet, solely in the hands of her head quarter and manipulated by her multinational clients. Planning was an empty device and power was no real power. The whole mechanism at the time can be comparable to a strict ‘bureaucracy’, busying itself with instruction and procedures coming from above. The bad side of bureaucracy, furthermore, was also reflected in the discontent - ‘boring’, felt by Felix and his colleagues at that period. They were actually a subjective response of the practitioners felt towards the condition of ‘inertia’. Flora, the regional director, explained to us how she felt when she first came to Phoenix:

“When I came here, I felt real frustrated, even though Bosco and Mark had already mentioned to me about the situation. I knew that there would be a lot to do in order to ‘rejuvenate’ the agency. The creative was not solid enough since

Bosco and Mark came before me just a week or two earlier. They needed time to consolidate. The account servicing was a mess and they didn't know really how to plan, for clients as well as campaigns. At the same time, the clientele was weak and we needed more clients who were strong and more up-beat. But what was most unbearable was the atmosphere – the 'tiredness', the sluggishness and the apathy. I realized at that very moment that it required not only a 'restructuring' but also 'revitalization'. What the agency really needed at that time was energy, the life forces that can move everybody and everything forward."

The above comment by Flora is significant in the sense that we now can have a more firm grasp of what it means by 'inertia' in an advertising agency. What Flora faced at the time when she first came to the agency can be interpreted as some unwanted consequences of following a bureaucracy model in an advertising environment and this can be quite devastating. When following procedures and indulging in details becomes the rule, an account servicing can become a 'mess', incapable of doing any 'substantive' planning. From the point of view of Flora, the 'ends' were forgotten, if not abandoned. But that was not incurable and it can be overcome by some 'restructuring' efforts. What was most devastating is the lack of 'life force' in the agency: 'the tiredness, the sluggishness and the apathy'. It was doubtful whether any creativity could be sustained in such kind of environment. So far, we know that, before the coming of the new leadership, the agency was haunted by the unwanted consequences of 'routinization' and she was in need of a wholesome 'revitalization'. That was the situation when Flora first came to

Phoenix and that was also the reason why Bosco and Mark were invited to become the leaders of the agency.

From the descriptions of Felix and Flora, Phoenix before the charismatic era was portrayed as a company deficient in autonomy and handicapped by the ‘routinization’ problem. The bad side of bureaucracy was so pronounced that it seems as if nothing can be done to remedy the situation. Lily, the personal secretary to Bosco and Mark, who worked as a creative assistant before the coming of the new leaders, describes to us the situation of helplessness the old leaders often faced in Phoenix:

“Mr. Chan [the old creative leader] had tried very hard to improve the situation at that time. I remember that there were many peoples come and gone in the creative department. But their average services were rather short, ranging from several weeks to three or four months. Some were very smart, but all were gone. I know that he wanted to bring more talented peoples in the agency, but it seems that he was fall short of his goal. Also, there were many meetings, quite formal, in the creative department. I was also required to attend. At the beginning, they were energetic, but everybody get bored and found them useless as time goes by...Mr. Chan tried also to keep the creative more disciplined by demanding colleagues at that time to stick to the office hours. However, I can say, it was not effective at all and people in the creative just stick to their habit rather than the office hours. And the bad consequence was that the relationship became tense and people felt discontented.”

The devices employed by the old leader were in sharp contrast, if not antithetical, to

what we had found in the present situation. We had mentioned in the previous chapters that the mobility in the personnel of the creative department is extremely low, comparing the high frequency under Chan's leadership. However, rather than a signal of Chan's incapability to keep his own creative fellows, the frequent changes of the creative personnel reveals that the situation he was facing was very difficult and the changing of staff seemed to be the only way to revitalize the impoverished creativity. However, the case shows that recruiting 'new blood' is not a sufficient means in overcoming the impoverished creativity. Devices used by Chan to 'strengthen' the creative base were actually disciplining techniques which contradict in its very nature with creativity. They served to curtail rather than facilitate the environment needed for the production of creativity. Furthermore, Chan was not the ideal leader needed at that difficult period. Felix gives the following portrayal of Chan:

"Chan worked very hard in overcoming the difficulties the agency was facing at that time and he personally was a hard working person. But he was not the kind of leader who can really save the company out of the abyss. He lacked the introvert quality of an artist, like Mark's. He also lacked the spontaneity and vision of Bosco. I would say his style is more suitable for some well-established agencies in which aim and direction are well defined and everything is so stable that he can carry out his administrative plan"

Although always delivering his words in a cynical and ironic way, Felix does give a

good explanation for the leaving of the old leader. The ‘administrative’ ability of a creative leader is not admired, if not denied, in the eyes of a non-creative people like Felix. By contrast, the quality of an artist, the vision and the spontaneity are all necessary elements for a creative leadership. It was because of the lack of these qualities that Chan failed the experiment, no matter how hard-working he was. Moreover, from the comments of Flora, Lily and Felix, we can know that Phoenix was in crisis at Chan’s period, permeated with ‘inertia’ and problems of ‘routinization’. Therefore, the condition did not tolerate further failures and was desperately in need of remedy of a different kind.

Another interesting as well as important point in Felix’s comment is that his viewpoint can serve to illustrate a mentality generally shared by the practitioners in the advertising field, that is, the importance of creativity and the recognition that it is an asset for all, including people from a non-creative background.

8.3 Accounting for Change

After a detailed analysis of the coming of leadership as we found in Phoenix, we would like to attend to some of the underlying causes of the changes. The first one can be described was a fear, whether consciously or unconsciously, generally shared by the advertising practitioners. It is the fear of being outworn in an extremely competitive environment that the leaders might choose to leave. In response to a question of the motive behind the competitive game of exploring niches in the market, Mark the creative leader gave a very explicit answer,

“We [referring the leadership and the agency] share the same worry. Although I believe we have done some very good campaigns for this company, it is no guarantee that the position we planned for this company can sustain for a very long time in the market. The niche we served previously will soon be eroded. It is very unwise for a 4A agency to stick to a style that is bound to be imitated by competitors in the market. It is also unwise for us (Bosco and Mark) to live in the daydreams of the past.”

The comment of Mark tells us in an obvious way that it is the fear of the erosion of the niche they previously served that drives behind the incessant quest for newness and the accompanying changes in creative personnel. It is a fear not particular to the advertising business or to any particular agency, but a constant fear for all those businesses that depend on creativity and gamble their future on styles. However, the above comment doesn't explain why changing leadership and creative personnel

is the solution to problem. Mark, at another occasion, told us that changing leadership is not the only solution but it is the most common way that advertising firms usually choose to do adopt. He explained thus:

“It is very natural for the creative leaders to part with the agency in the long run. I know that there are some other ways for tackling the problem, but ending the contractual relationship and starting a new one by recruiting a new group headed by a talented leader is the most effective and the quickest way to renew or refresh the agency. It is especially the case when it comes to a creative-driven agency like ours. The relatively small in size and simple in structure allow a fast adaptation and make the turnover to the new leadership easier. However, it is doubly difficult to change the perception of the clients. It is especially true for the successful leadership because you are so identified with a certain styles or position in the clients’ minds that changing the impression is always the most difficult task.”

The above comment of Mark is very important in the sense that it touches issues of utmost importance in our analysis of the charismatic leadership. The physical characteristics of the agency itself like size and simple structure are all facilitating factors for embodying changes in the environment of advertising. In Mark’s words, they “allow a fast adaptation and make the turnover to the new leadership easier”. However, it is more difficult to stay and create something new because the clients stick to their impression about an agency’s style. To the clients, changes of styles imply a violation or betrayal on one’s ‘style’. On the contrary, changes of leadership speak to the clients that the old style is gone and all have to start anew,

including the client-agency relationship. So, it is out of a pragmatic evaluation that most leaders would choose to leave in the long run for it is to their and to the company's benefit to start anew in a highly competitive market.

Besides pressures from outer environment, pressures internally grown out of the bureaucratic alignment can be more noteworthy. Notwithstanding the merits contributing to overcoming a mechanical bureaucratic structure and to fabricating an integrative culture, charisma, too, can be affected by the 'routinization' problem. So, despite the fact that the leadership in Phoenix has taken some very conscious and courageous efforts in welcoming changes, they sense also a feeling of helplessness in face of the powerful inertia.

"We do try our best to not framing ourselves. We don't want people to perceive us as belonging to some style or school, nor do we want them to say something like 'Ah! That is the way they are doing thing'. But, honestly speaking, it's really beyond our control. People and clients are tended to find a pattern out of something else. It is similar true as for our creative colleagues. As time goes by, they would stick to something else. But the worst scenario is that they would tend to stick to us. That is the most undesirable thing for us."

The above comment of Mark points to an essential problem regarding any type of charismatic leadership, that is, the tendency of being eroded by inertia. All kinds of dogmatic interpretations, and even fanaticism, are due to this inert tendency.

Even though the creative leaders in Phoenix try very hard strategically to revitalize the ability in facing changes in the context of an advertising agency, there are still some areas they can hardly take control of. The first concerns the source of 'capital', represented by the clients and the second concerns the executors of creativity, who are their fellow colleagues. Both are the most important 'resources' regarding the advertising business. To Mark, there is no effective way to deal with the problem because, as he mentioned in another interview, "Mind is already very hard to change, how can you change the heart of some people?" The 'heart' he is referring to is the 'heart' of their followers. In his opinions, the only way out of this dilemma is to 'start anew'. In the following dialogue, we are given an answer:

"Sometimes, to start anew is a very healthy decision. It is especially true for the advertising business. Clients might think that your creativity is now making a new turn and they believe that there would be some 'chemistry' happening if you work for a new company. It is understandable for how he is imaging for this new venture, since we are forming a new team and working under a new administrative structure. But I know that the main reason is simply because we are starting anew. It sounds very unreasonable. But it is very interesting to know that people change their usual way of perceiving thing not because of your telling them you've changed but the actions you have taken to show them changing is happening. However, starting anew means differently for our fellow colleagues. Usually, we cannot bring all of our colleagues to a new agency. It is impossible, as well as undesirable. Somebody would continue to stay or to go to some other agencies. Although it might sound a bit cruel, I still insist that it is a healthy process. After all, it is part of the learning process and a chance to learn something new."

It is very obvious in the above quotation that starting anew is the most effective way, if not the most desirable, to renew the perception held by the clients. It is also a very practical way to regenerate as well as to refresh the momentum of creativity in the process of rearranging manpower during the rebuilding of the creative team. What Mark has revealed to us is not a picture particular to the agency he is working for, but a widespread phenomenon in the field of advertising. The turnover in manpower is similarly frequent even for those agencies that are characterized as 'account based' in which the bureaucratic elements are more pronounced. The universality of the phenomenon, however, does not weaken our argument that the inertia of the charisma might lead to some extreme ways, like starting anew, to regenerate itself in face of the incessant pressure for changing, but opens us to the question of whether some elements of charisma are an essential feature for most of the creative industries.

For the part of the followers, we observe that most of them regard changes as 'a part of learning', 'a necessary adventure in the advertising business', 'a usual practice' and 'a life's challenges'. Some of them even think of 'leaving the advertising field' as 'no big deal', as long as they are doing something related to 'culture', art and design. Interestingly, publishing is the field many choose to be

the ideal jobs next to advertising. Some would mention setting up small businesses with friends if they are leaving the field and most of those businesses are in fact 'leisure culture' businesses such as 'cafes serving special coffees', 'bar opened for friends and celebrities', 'home-made cake shop', 'bookshop specializing visual arts'.

Positive feelings are generally found in the creative practitioners regarding changes; no matter they will go for some new positions in other agencies or develop a business of their own. The varieties of interests shown above does not obscure that fact that they are 'culture-lovers'. This is partly indebted to the 'education' learnt from the creative leaders, but more importantly due to their sharing of the mission advocated by the leaders. It is, as we mentioned in the previous chapter, under the calling to join in a collective manner for some shared values and beliefs that the creative followers realign their activities and careers around an integrative centre far broader and more far reaching than a particular organization can confine them to. The following comment of Tammy well illustrates the underlying importance of the influence of the leaders:

"I've learnt a lot from them (Bosco and Mark), but it is not totally about advertising. It is more about life-positioning. It is mainly due to them that I realize that I am the kind of person who find very secure, as well as enjoyable, if I am near to something relating to 'culture'. However, I know that reality is

sometimes tough. I might not find an agency like this [referring to the Phoenix] or get a job I really want. I don't mind! But I won't identify myself with any of them. I need to be faithful to myself. I need to protect the most precious 'centre' of mine and I believe that it is my mission."

The case is exemplary in the sense that the mission of Tammy echoes very intimately to what we have mentioned in the previous chapter about the mission of the creative leadership. The bold assertion of Tammy to non-identify with anything which has no echo to her 'centre' can be interpreted as a variation of theme of the non-identification of any style in the philosophy of the creative leaders. To her, the job is secondary. It is again an expression of the emphasizing of ends over means. The love for culture is of course inherited from the mission as advocated by the leaders. But what is most important is the way Tammy turns it into a mission of her own, endowing herself with a belief in a career far exceeding the confines of any single company or any single business field.

To conclude this section, we can say that changes mean very differently for the leaders and their followers, but both of them are prepared for the changes. This preparation is of course rooted in their experiences gained in the process of charismatic leadership. It allows the leaders to see changes as a way to refresh and regenerate creativity and it also allows the followers to see beyond the confines of

occupation in welcoming changes as life challenges.

8.4 Interpreting Change

In this section, we would like to concentrate on a very important issue, that is, what it means by changes for the advertising institution. To answer the question, we must acknowledge the fact that the whole enterprise of advertising is driven by the capitalist logic. The urge to incorporate changes for the advertising mechanism is but a variant of what Daniel Bell described as one of the central theme of capitalism, that is, the ‘incessant quest for newness’. It is also a bigger version, at the level of institution, of what had been analyzed in chapter five of the pressures generally experienced by the creative professional. Institutionally, the ‘heroic adventurous mentality’ is even more pronounced. In the following comment of Flora, the regional director, we can find a very conscious attitude in ‘embracing’ the pressure associated with the incessant quest for newness in the market:

“The market is really highly competitive. The only survival key is to change and to courageously taking the challenge in finding your own niche in the market. But changes in the advertising business means very differently from other industries. It does not necessarily imply that there is a re-structuring for the whole of the company. It is rather concerned about the creative core. Changes in the creative core mean that you are announcing to your clients that the focus of the whole company is now being shifted to a such and such direction. It is all about ‘styling’. In the styling game, the leaders must fabricate a very particular style for the company.”

In the above comment of Flora, we notice that the awareness for the industry as

well as for the practitioners of a conscious participation in a 'styling' game echoes very intimately with the logic of craving for newness. It is now expressed in a very concrete way in the advertising business. In the words of Flora, it is a 'styling game' and it affects and concerns not only the products and services of an advertising agency, but the institution of advertising as a whole. It is mainly because of the logic of craving for newness that all the agencies in the advertising field are compelled to participate in a struggle for niches in the market. Accordingly, the production of these 'niches' depends very much on the creative personnel. The phenomenon of the frequent changes of leadership can be interpreted as a conscious effort for the whole of the advertising field to incorporate the elements of changes in the face of this 'styling game'.

Going deeper, we are led to ask the question of how advertising, in its own way, incorporate changes driven by this 'styling game'. The case shows us that advertising represents a very peculiar arrangement because it organizes not only the creative resources but regenerates its own organization in a very dramatic way. It is dramatic in the sense that it involves not only changes in the organizational structure, but a critical changes in the leadership, accompanied by a set of 'mission', 'style' and the way it does creativity. Flora has made the following comment:

“Changes are in the true sense very critical. It might not be very extensive. And it might not involve the basic administrative structure. But the ‘style’ will be changed or at least the main direction concerning creativity is to be changed. Because we have different creative people now. It is especially the case for a creative-driven agency like ours. The centre of gravity is to be changed. We are actually replacing the ‘head’ of our agency. Although the body remains, the thinking and the facial outlook are substantially changed.”

The metaphor of ‘head’ and ‘body’ that Flora used to describe changes is very illuminating for our understanding of the structure of an advertising agency. In spite of the fact that it is organized basically along a bureaucratic format, it contains a very flexible capacity to incorporate changes. It also explains the fact that changes in leadership is a cause as well as an effect. It is a cause in the sense that it takes the lead to initiate changes and it is an effect of the logic of craving for newness. Put it in a more appropriate way, the ‘head’ changing can be comparable to a regenerating device incorporated into a more or less permanent design in the advertising mechanism. This ‘head’ refers to none but the ‘leadership’ we have analyzed in these two chapters so far. We know that the changing of this ‘head’ means not only a turnover of leadership but also a substantive change regarding the quality and the nature of ‘creativity’. It involves not only a superficial change of advertising style, but a shift or change of gravity in relation to the mission as well as vision concerning the direction and positioning of the whole company.

What is most important is the propensity towards leadership of a charismatic type. It provides the condition upon which the organization can respond in a more wholesome way to changes. In the opinion of Flora, it is a mechanism especially suitable for agencies near to the 'creative-driven' end. The main reference here is of course the charismatic leadership in Phoenix. So, we can now have a more well grounded explanation for the apparent 'only way out' strategy Mark has used in dealing with the inertia of charisma in the previous chapter. They are two sides of the same coin. Or, put it more sociologically, actions at the individual level define, and are defined by, the structure at a more macroscopic level. The flexibility of the organization allows people to overcome the inherent inertia generally experienced by companies organized bureaucratically. At the same time, the very way the charismatic leadership employs change defines the main character of the structure. It is a structure aligned mainly on a bureaucratic format, but 'headed' by a charismatic leadership. It can be metaphorically portrayed as a being comprised of a thinking 'head' and a bureaucratic 'body'.

This is mainly because of this flexible structure that instability is built into a 'device' and this device is designed in good preparation for the replacement of the

‘software’ needed to organize the whole structure. It is not only a response but an innovative response in the face of the pressure of the capitalist logic. On the one hand, it makes good use of a bureaucratic format in aligning its resources in its most efficient way to tailor to the exigencies required of capitalism. On the other hand, the way it is organized makes it easier to regenerate itself in the face of the logic of the incessant craving for newness in the market. We would like to say that, the flexible structure as demonstrated in Phoenix might serve as a reference model for not only the advertising business, but most of the creative-driven and style-oriented businesses.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

9.1 Introduction

This chapter is going to make a concluding statement for my whole thesis. The aim is twofold. The first is to answer the main question as posed in the beginning of the thesis, namely how creativity is possible in a capitalist organization. The second is to point out the sociological significance of the thesis. So, it will be arranged into two parts.

The former will readdress the question about the nature of capitalism, discussing it in view of the analyses I have done through Chapter Five through Eight. The key concepts as pertinent to capitalism, as brought up and reviewed in the literature review, will be reevaluated in the light of my research findings. I would like to put forward the argument that creativity in a capitalist context, though tension-laden, is a possible pursuit. Creativity, as demonstrated in the research, is possible in spite of the double pressures exerted by the need for profit and order. There are different factors, i.e. 'team working format', 'the quest for newness', etc.,

contributing to the development of creativity, but the most important of all is charismatic leadership. The leadership as we found in the study functions as an active, value-oriented and high-energy platform, powerful enough to balance off the need for order and profit on the one hand and to induce changes on the other. However, it is far from an accidental occurrence – it is not an ad hoc strategy or a temporary policy. The marketing-advertising environment, at an institutional level, has already prepared the ground for adopting this organizational platform. The need for a platform which can bring in more creativity coincides with the fast tempo of the rapidly changing contemporary market. It is upon this context that the relationship between capitalism and creativity is more dialectical than tradition supposes it to be. The dynamics, as shown in my research findings, though appearing to be in conflict at the microscopic level, can bring positive function to the organization as well as the institution as a whole.

The latter is a continuing exploration of the former. It tries to locate the significance of the study by drawing attention to the device/agent/mechanism of the ‘charismatic leadership’. I would like to call attention to the advantage of charismatic leadership in adapting and opening to changes on the one hand and in integrating and fabricating new ideas and values on the other. I believe that this

advantage is already demonstrated in the case I have analyzed in the study and I hope that it can serve as an exemplar for all the 'culture industry' and for all those organizations in which the capitalist logic has set in.

9.2 Creativity: A Difficult but Possible Achievement

Throughout the study, I was guided by a central argument that creativity is not only possible but indispensable for the capitalist organization. In this case study of an advertising agency in Hong Kong, I have demonstrated how creativity can be developed in spite of the double pressures of maximizing profit and upholding order. It is due mainly to the efforts of the leaders, skillfully and tactfully, to tailor to the needs for profit and order as well as to cultivate the condition needed for developing creativity.

In the analysis chapters, particularly chapter Five and Six, I have shown that the pressures working to constrain creativity in an advertising agency are ubiquitous. They can be grouped under two headings, profit maximization and upholding order, and they stand for the demands generally shared by nearly all kinds of organizations in a capitalist society.

The first set of pressures, arising from the need for profit, expresses itself most notably in two phenomena in the case I selected for this study: 'client intrusion' in the operation of the advertising agency and the 'alienation' issue. They create a lot of tensions as well as conflicts at the individual level and the pressures are also

subjectively felt by the practitioners as creativity is at the same time ‘interfered’ with and ‘alienated’. Regarding the ‘interference’ issue, the client power is so predominant that the demand for profit is directly reflected in the frequent intrusion of the client in the daily operation of the advertising agency and it is dramatically embodied in the person of the client representatives. Thus, the pressure manifests not only an internal control of cost and budget out of the agency’s own interests, but it acts also as an ever-present external force of monitoring the daily operation up to the small details. This results a weakening of the autonomy of the agency, especially over areas characterizing creativity work.

The pressures relating to the ‘alienation’ are more complicated. In the research findings, we can find scant evidence for alienation as described in a Braverman’s way but it does not mean that the alienation problem is non-existent in the advertising case. The problem expresses itself in a more subtle manner in a kind of internal censorship regarding aesthetic freedom and in the pressure for craving ‘newness’.

The first puts a constraint in the subjective minds of the practitioners to dissociate themselves away from the image of an ‘artist’, resulting in a self-limiting mentality that restrains the exploration in creativity. The second expresses itself in a compulsive craving for ‘newness’, leading the practitioners into endless fatigue and

exhaustion. Alienation in this peculiar form is no less serious than the factory model since the impossibility to catch up with the 'new' results in self-resentment as well as self-reification, both functioning to weaken the foundation of human dimension that all creativity depends.

As for the pressures relating to the need of rationality and order, the research shows that the agency in focus aligns itself on a bureaucratic format, with 'offices' basically premised on a hierarchical order and regulated by formal rules. The pressure is most intense when the bureaucracy is defined as an end in itself and respecting order is perceived to be a habit for its own sake. It is known as the 'routinization' problem. But the dysfunction of bureaucracy is to some extent curtailed by the introduction of the team working platform in the workplace. Team working, long adopted as the most common platform in the advertising practice, functions to remedy the unnecessary delays and misunderstanding usually characterizing most of bureaucracies and helping to facilitate the communication process needed for the production of creativity.

However, in spite of the positive functions to ease out tensions and facilitate communication, the tendency for team working to succumb to the routinization

process is no less weak. In the case of Phoenix, it is most seriously expressed in the suspension of individual judgment concerning decision-making and the intentional avoidance of conflicts in the interrelationship among colleagues. Both combines to weaken the team working format as an interactive as well as responsive communication platform for the cultivation of creativity.

As shown in the case, the importance of the leaders lies exactly in keeping in check the demands for profit and order and promoting the necessary conditions needed for cultivating creativity. The strategies they adopt to fulfill this aim include the in-depth negotiation with clients, the pragmatic attitude towards creativity, the belief in their fellow colleagues of possessing unique quality and capable of making independent judgment and the nurturing of a humanistic environment. Furthermore, the emphasis on individual freedom, taking the initiative to upset order, the encouragement to stand in for one's position and opinion and fighting for 'authenticity', all promoting an environment that functions to balance off the rigidity and pressure as exerted by bureaucracy.

In fact, apart from taking up their managerial tasks, the leaders act more as the symbolic head of pioneering into the unknown area of creativity. This requires

not only the courage of violating the rule of the existing order but a strong sense of vision about creativity as well as the advertising industry. Here we can notice that the 'entrepreneurial spirit' as advocated by Sombart and Schumpeter is not an abstract concept but finds its expression embodied in the creative leaders in the case of the advertising agency. In contrast to the assertion of modern 'managerialism', the case shows that the leaders refuse to reduce creativity into an 'empowering' tool for only a managerial purpose or a moderating device for maintaining the status quo of the organization. Rather, the focus is to maneuver the possibility of the unknown and the new. In the field research, I have demonstrated how the leaders time and again make use of the instances of violating the established order for the purpose of exploring new grounds for creativity. This includes not only areas concerning the creative practice of the advertising work, but also more abstract areas at the organizational level. First, the redefinition of the clients as negotiable partner helps to extend the scope of the organization, thus facilitating the implementation at the operational level and balancing off the demand for profit. Second, the flow of the operation is tilted towards prevention rather than remedy, thus setting the stage for the emergence of a more initiating, responsive and independent staff. Third, the promotion of the pragmatic attitude leads the company to refocus on outcomes rather than inputs. It helps to enhance the

flexibility needed for the whole company in coping with the pressure as generated by the bureaucratic structure. Last but not least, the energy driving behind the whole organization rests upon the foundation of mission and vision rather than rules and regulations. All of the above helps to re-position an organization in a more 'creative' way.

Although the concept of an 'entrepreneur' depicts quite a lot of characteristics I have found in the leaders in the case, a full portrayal of the leadership has to take into consideration Max Weber's concept of 'charisma'. First, this concept helps explain that the cultivation of creativity is not due to a single individual but a social structure that includes basically the leaders as well as the followers. Second, it also helps explain the dynamics in the relationships between the leaders and the followers, which is the momentum of creativity. Third, the interpretation of the leadership as a high-energy platform capable of disrupting the established order and rebuilding a new one shows exactly how 'charisma' is put into practice. Fourth, the concept serves to highlight the importance of vision and mission in organizing manpower as well as creativity. These are the dimensions well captured in Weber's concept of 'charisma'.

In the research findings, there are a lot of evidences for showing that the dynamics in the advertising agency is one characterized by an intense and informal personal relationship that converges towards the fulfillment of some substantive beliefs. Belief can be about profession, career and the ideal of creativity, but what is most important is that it expresses itself as the central force outpouring energetically to encompass all of the organization into a whole. This differs in a substantial sense from what we found in the contemporary 'company mission' talks in two notable ways. First, the mission is believed to be emanating from the symbolic head and an outgrowth of a particular charismatic centre. The direction of the organization is significantly influenced by the charismatic core rather than by the need of the organization itself. Second, the practitioners under the charismatic leadership regard the partaking of values as a kind of devotion to an ideal, thus fabricating a passionate mentality in term of 'mission'. This is expressed in the case by the active and willing participation of the practitioners to implement the mission. In short, what I find in the research is a high-energy platform of a charismatic group, driven more by vision than by rules or procedures, for the attainment of a commonly shared ideal.

However, notwithstanding the importance of charismatic leadership, creativity is

made possible not only because it is one of those assets or capital needed for generating outputs for the market, but primarily because it serves as a third factor, along with profit maximization and efficiency, in developing capitalism. In other words, it is out of an organizational need for capitalism to incorporate creativity into its basic structure. Thus, creativity plays not only the role of a stake for struggles. It is not only a mediating device that serves to facilitate the operation of an organization. It is more of an expression of a basic but often over-looked dimension of capitalism, that is, the incessant need for change and exploration.

The fact that capitalism is increasingly embedded in an unstable environment full of opportunities and uncertainties has already sown the seeds for the emergence of a more flexible kind of organization. Historically speaking, the reason for the balance to tilt towards taking after the need for profit and order rests basically on a narrow economic interpretation of social organization. The old emphasis on the two cornerstones of profit maximization and upholding order is in fact an extension of a paradigm premised on the issue of production. However, this narrow understanding overlooks the importance of the social-cultural dimension of capitalism. In the view of Weber, it is also manifested in a set of mentality or spirit. In the hands of Sombart and Schumpeter, this mentality requires an

accompanying attitude in facing and welcoming changes. This reveals that, alongside the demand for profit and order, there is a missing link regarding the concept of capitalism. All through the study, I have so far argued that creativity is an indispensable concept in understanding this missing link in capitalism. By way of Weber's concept of charisma, creativity can be expressed in the form of charismatic leadership. This platform serves primarily to transcend the limitation of the production paradigm, extending the scope of any organization to take into consideration any cultural and social changes in the environment. Moreover, it also serves as a platform which is capable of bringing in changes.

In the analyses of the case, especially chapter Seven and Eight, I have shown that the charismatic leadership, besides securing a favourable condition for developing creativity in a capitalist organization, functions also as a flexible, vision-oriented and high-energy platform which helps to rejuvenate the organization. It can be illustrated most clearly in its capability to incorporate instability and changes into the organizational structure, even to the extent for the existing leadership to be replaced by a new one. The fact that this platform fits in well enough into a capitalist structure reveals at least that creativity is needed by capitalism. In other words, it is an expression of the other face of capitalism, that is, the incessant need

to explore the unknown and the new.

9.3 Theoretical Significance

The study is exploratory in nature and offers a case study of a capitalist organization specializing creativity. As shown in the above, the cultivation of creativity in a capitalist organization is a complicated tug-of-war launched in two fronts, meeting the requirements of both profit and efficiency on the one hand and exploring new frontiers of ideas and techniques on the other. So, the maintenance of the balance is very much dependent on the leaders' skills and tactfulness in not only activating and sustaining a dynamic which brings in changes, but also keeping it in check against chaos. Moreover, the existence of the charismatic leadership is not an accidental occurrence, but rather, a necessary platform needed by the organization in face of the fast changing environment. Thus, in spite of the idiosyncratic elements of the case, I believe that the significance of the charismatic leadership can be extended at a theoretical level to shed light on future studies on capitalist organizations, especially those in which the laboring process and output involves a lot of creativity. Below are the advantages the platform of charismatic leadership possesses in rejuvenating capitalism.

First, in relevance to the question of change, the platform of charismatic leadership can play the role of an active agent in opening to changes. The commercial

environment is increasingly demanding in posing challenges to organizations, whether they are profit-making or not, to respond to changes. Audience is in 'mobile' and fast-shifting. Hence it is very difficult to locate a 'loyal' market as 'taste' is fast changing and the virtue of fashion is predominant. It is questionable whether the market share can be maintained if no exploration is made on the market as well as the product. For most organizations, the pressure leading to a sterile state situation is mainly due to the malfunctioning of the bureaucracy. The advantage of charismatic leadership lies exactly at its disrupting power of breaking order and combating routine, opening up room for new ideas and experiments.

At the organizational level, as demonstrated in the advertising case, the charismatic leadership is capable of initiating a dramatic change regarding the organization as a whole. It is achieved by the replacement of the leadership itself. The changing of leadership means at the same time a replacement of a new set of 'software', which can serve to bring in new reforms concerning the organization itself. It represents not only a response but an innovative tactic in the face of the pressure of the capitalist logic. The fact that the charismatic leadership bases its premise not on the organization but the ideal of mission makes it easier to leave for other companies. It is also due to this peculiar arrangement that organizations adopting

the charismatic platform can more easily respond to changes.

Built on these advantages, the platform also leads us to rethink about the nature of the capitalist market. The continuous development of capitalism can be understood to be a circulation phenomenon rather than a linear advancement of production. It concerns not only products and services circulating in the consumption market, but also the labor mobility in the labor market. On the one hand, the charismatic form can serve to facilitate an easier adaptation for the personnel on the market. On the other hand, the charisma of the leadership retains the vitality and energy needed in an organizational format. At a macroscopic level, the charismatic group can be pictured as some mobile 'software' available for an equally mobile market, sets as its target to rejuvenate the organizations by implanting its logic onto their hardware.

All in all, I would like to say that, the flexibility and dynamism demonstrated in the example of charismatic leadership can serve as a reference for not only the advertising business, but any organization intended to embracing changes.

9.4 Qualifications Regarding Relevance

As this study is exploratory in nature, there are surely limitations and issues left untouched due to the theoretical approach and methodological position I am choosing for this study.

The investigation has purposefully focused on the work experience of the advertising practitioners under the context of a capitalist organization. It draws its theoretical resources out of the sociological tradition concerning issues arising from within capitalism. Following an approach as such, the prime concern for this study is the relationship between 'economy' and 'culture' as it manifest as conflicting as well as concurring forces in the organizational setting of an advertising agency. So, the study is limited by its theoretical position as regarding other factors that might well be also influencing the work experience of the advertising practitioners. For examples, gender and age, though mentioned in the alienation issue in the study, are not given enough attention and the issues as related to them are basically left untouched. They are of course very important factors and their impacts on the performance of work, work experience and more specifically the experience of creativity can be suggested as avenues for future research.

Moreover, this study is limited also by confining its analysis basically within an organizational setting. The production of creativity is increasingly affected by the commercial setting in which an advertising agency is set. There are some influential 'periphery' forces at work in the commercial setting: they comprise a network of auxiliary services like graphic, photographic and film production houses, 'free-lance' creative practitioners and post-production professional services and include also the star and celebrity effect, the power of the media and the government intervention. These 'periphery' forces are equally important as the 'core' activities of the creative practice and it is suggested that future researchers can venture into this commercial setting to see how creativity is actualized in a complex network of commercial practice.

Last but not least, the investigation is, after all, based on a case study. The generalisability of the study is limited and it has no claim to generalize the result to the advertising industry as a whole. Moreover, there is no intention of this study to over-claim that the advertising practitioners under research are representatives of all advertising practitioners in the industry. The group researched is a small group and the agency selected for this study is obviously a 'creative-driven' one. Situations can be quite different if the investigation were launched in an

‘account-based’ advertising agency. I look forward to future researches to remedy this limitation by extending the coverage to other agencies within the advertising industry, or to different kinds of organizations in the ‘culture industry’.

POSTSCRIPT

Not long after I had formally completed the fieldwork of this study, Phoenix experienced its most drastic changes in her history in Hong Kong. In late 2001, with the arrival of a new regional chairman, Phoenix International announced a series of restructuring for its Asia-Pacific operations. The new regional chairman, watching over the whole Asia-Pacific area, including Thailand, Singapore, Manila, Malaysia, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, took strong measures to consolidate the Phoenix network across Asia. In the beginning, this action was intended to be Phoenix's effort to build offices as a network on a global scale on the one hand and to consolidate the market on the other. However, what followed was a series of blow with the sudden departure of many senior executives and the loss of its multi-million dollar mobile telecommunications account. In the office of Singapore, the chief executive officer and the chief creative director left. In Hong Kong, the case was even worse. Flora, the managing director had resigned to take up a similar role at another 4A agency in town. Flora's departure followed the defection of a major telecom account to the start-up agency set up by Bosco and Mark, the two charismatic leaders.

The changes come months after the new leader took over as the regional chairman of the agency. The new leader claimed that the restructuring aimed at increasing Phoenix's competitive offering and enhancing the network's synergy. In an interview, the new leader made his intention clear, *"The perception in the marketplace is that each office operates in its own kingdom. We want to change that."* (Media, 2002c) But people in the advertising circle read it as another example of global enterprises to 'centralize' their power against diversity across cities and countries. It was believed that it was this very action to reassert its power at the expense of the autonomy of the local offices that triggered off a series of crises in Phoenix.

But crises for Phoenix means at the same time a new beginning for the charismatic leaders. With a trump card of a multi-million account at hand, they courageously set up a new agency together with two senior creative directors. The start-up agency was a Hong Kong-based company run entirely by creatives, meaning that the account servicing function was absorbed into the creative department. Although it was not the first and only agency in Hong Kong to function without an account servicing branch, the unusual 'line-up' of the new agency put it at a position no similar to the orthodox idea of a proper advertising organization. The charismatic leader, Bosco, supplied a bold statement for his new company in a formal interview,

"It's time for a new business model because the traditional agency organization is outdated."

(Media, 2002d) However, it did not entail that the charismatic leaders were blind to the function of account servicing, they still believed that strategy and research were both good instruments for doing advertising, but only that, in their opinion, the account servicing in Hong Kong resulted only in inefficiency and ineffectiveness. It seemed that the start-up agency was a satire written for the history of Hong Kong advertising, mocking the conventional scenario by superseding and 'swallowing' the account servicing arm.

As a conscious effort to rewrite a new chapter in the history of Hong Kong advertising, the new agency was small in size, lean in its structure and simple in hierarchy. With strategic planning and client negotiation responsible mainly by the directors (four at her establishing stage), the agency can mobilize most of its resources and manpower to devote to the creative practices. The other charismatic leader, Mark, commented in an interview, *"Advertising is a people business and if you get too big and bureaucratic, you begin to lose touch with the clients"*. (Media, 2002d) Remaining small, the leaders believed that most of the bureaucratic defects can be curtailed and ideas can be effectively communicated to the clients.

Although the ‘unorthodox’ practice of the new agency had created quite a lot of controversies inside the advertising circle – no support for brand development, a loose communication platform, a maverick agency for only some maverick brands, etc., the ‘charisma’ of the leaders reigned high. Followers in Phoenix and old colleagues before the Phoenix period came streaming into the new agency. To keep the new company lean and small, the leaders selectively picked up one-third of their followers in Phoenix as their new colleagues at the set-up stage. The offerings of the new agency were not exceptionally attractive as compared to other big 4A agencies, but followers expected a vibrant and promising career more than the size of a compensation package. They were more concerned about training and development, but courses not directly related to advertising were also welcome. They wanted leadership and communication, but not high-handed orders and uni-directional instructions. What they had in mind was rather a stage of ‘transformation’. The followers believed that, under the guidance of the charismatic leaders, they will undergo a process to make or remake themselves into a new kind of advertising professional: a responsive and active business representative of his or her own creative advantages.

In the summer of 2002, about half a year after the establishment of the new agency,

another creative director in Phoenix was also joined as partner in the new agency. Now the new agency was a 'five-man' partnership, but the size of the company was remaining small – under 30 people, including the auxiliary personnel. But the story continued to spread inside the marketing and advertising circle. By the annual year end of 2002, the foundation of the new agency was further secured as more important clients were attracted to her: an online broker account, just like the multi million telecom account, left Phoenix and followed the leaders; a children clothing retailer was obtained without any pitching; a major property developer was won over to her side subsequent to a successful battle against other international 4A agencies. By ways of different channels, the new agency continued to consolidate her power in the market. But it had nothing to do with the size of manpower and capital. The new agency won over her people and clients by whims and charms.

To further develop the metaphor in Chapter Eight, "Opening to Change", the new agency can be seen as a good demonstration of how the 'thinking head', when it consciously 'lost weight' on its bureaucratic body, can 'revolutionize' the advertising practice. The 'charismatic' leaders, supported by their faithful followers, succeeded in embracing creativity in full, even to the extent to fabricate a new 'body' to manifest their idea of advertising. The new agency can be seen as a concrete

manifestation of their disrupting charismatic power and their charismatic vision to create anew. In addition, the new agency can also be seen as a coup d'état of the creative people. No intermediary was needed and no translating device was allowed to interrupt creativity. No longer satisfied to stay 'backstage', the creatives took over the role of 'broker' from the account servicing, a device advertising used to contain 'wild' creativity, and began a war not only on the account system but also on the conventional idea of an advertising agency.

People come and go. The going of the charismatic leaders was not a full stop for Phoenix. Phoenix will sooner or later find the kind of creativity that goes well with its platform. Just like everything else in a capitalist context, creativity cannot stay still for long. There is no guarantee that the start-up agency can function all the way well. Forms worn out faster than forces. Creativity is, after all, the basic human impulse that needs to be kept wild to sustain its vitality.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Initial Letter Seeking Organizational Participation and Access

Research Title: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of Creativity in Capitalism

To: The Executive Creative Directors

Request for Granting Access to Research at Phoenix Advertising Agency

Thank you very much for your generous support in my research. I am considering beginning the research project in the coming weeks, so I would like to get your permission for entry to Phoenix advertising agency.

I know that my presence in the agency might cause some inconveniences, but I would try my best to keep these nuisances to its minimum. Also I realize that confidentiality regarding clients' information is always your company's utmost concern. I hereby declare that, being an academic researcher, information gathered in the research will be kept in strict confidence and will not be used for non-academic purposes.

Enclosed please find a proposal for this research project which I should like to submit for your consideration.

I hope that I have included all the information you require, but if there is anything further you need please let me know.

Best,

Chung Chi Leung, Daniel

Appendix B: Proposal for Field Research in Phoenix Hongkong

Project Title:	A Socio-cultural Analysis of Creativity in Capitalism: A Case Study of an Advertising Agency in Hong Kong
Project Researcher:	Chung Chi Leung, Daniel, a postgraduate studying sociology at the Department of Applied Social Sciences Department in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Start Date:	15 th March 2001
Expected Completion:	15 th October 2001
Principal Aim:	To investigate how a Hong Kong advertising agency in capitalism organizes itself for creativity
Objectives:	<p>The research will be concerned with:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The design of the organization of an advertising firm for maximizing its economic reward.2. The principles and devices used for maintaining order in an advertising firm.3. The approaches and techniques of organizing for creativity and innovation
Methods:	<p>The fieldwork achieves its objectives by using basically the qualitative kind of methods. Participant observation will be the principal technique used throughout, and the researcher will take notes in the observation process. Some in-depth interviews will also be done at the individual level as well as at the group level. In order to facilitate the process, a small voice-recording machine and a snap camera will be carried around by the researcher to store up information.</p>
Outcomes:	<p>The information gathered in the fieldwork process will form the data used for the preparation of a doctoral thesis titled with the above mentioned project name in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.</p>

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